THE END OF THE PRESENT WORLD

AND

THE MYSTERIES OF THE FUTURE LIFE

by

FATHER C.-M.-A. ARMINJON

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This book:

- was written over a century ago, yet was surely designed by Divine Providence especially for our day.

- was immediately and explosively influential when first published in France in 1881.

- was acknowledged by St. Theresa of Lisieux in her writings as possibly the single most important inspiration for the dedication of her life to the path which led to her becoming, in the words of Pope St. Pius X, "the greatest saint of modern times."

- was then allowed to fall - or was pushed - into oblivion, and scarcely heard of again, until, in the 1960s, right in the "Vatican II" era, the Office Central de Lisieux noticed the references to it in St. Theresa's writings and felt impelled to bring this most un-"Vatican II"-like book back into print (in French), and to keep it there for some twenty years, until abandoning it for good on the grounds that its contents "do not reflect the ideas of our time."

- And is now translated by arrangement with us and presented to the English-speaking world as one of the truly epoch-making Catholic works, one of the greatest and most inspiring masterpieces of Catholic literature to have been written since the Reformation.

General Description.

The End of the Present World and the Mysteries of the Future Life is a compendium of Catholic doctrine and tradition on the subject of eschatology, also known as the science of the Last Things. Eschatology falls into two halves: the Last Things as they concern the world (the great apostasy from the Church; the

Antichrist persecutions; the return of "the two witnesses", Henoch and Elias; the conversion of the Jews; the Second Coming of Our Lord; the resurrection of the dead; and the General Judgement) and the Last Things as they concern individuals (death, judgement, Heaven and Hell, to quote the "Penny" Catechism); and Fr. Arminjon deals comprehensively with both halves.

We do not hesitate to assert that no subject is more important or more enthralling than that of the Last Things, and we are scarcely less confident in asserting that never has there been written a treatment of the subject that is more thorough, more penetrating, more inspiring, or more securely founded on the authority of the popes, Fathers, saints and acclaimed theologians of the Catholic Church than this work by Fr. Arminjon.

It is difficult to know how best to give an indication of the book's extraordinary qualities; for although we must clearly highlight its salient features, this could be off-putting to some readers, frightening them into thinking that the author's erudition and exhaustive attention to detail must make the book heavy going and perhaps difficult to understand.

We emphasize at the outset, therefore, that one could almost call it a weakness of the book that it can be enjoyed for its literary qualities alone. So compulsively does the author carry the reader from one page to the next, that it is tempting to read the book too fast and too superficially, instead of digesting and meditating on each passage so as to ensure that the important and often terrible truths that Fr. Arminjon sets out become a permanent part of the reader's intellectual equipment.

No, the book is not difficult to read. Let us glance at its other qualities.

As already mentioned, it is comprehensive. Fr. Arminjon seems to overlook nothing in examining his subject. As each relevant point is presented for analysis, he begins by considering it in the light of Holy Scripture, then quotes appositely from Catholic authorities, then carefully explains the correct interpretation of the Scriptural passages, and finally sheds what further light on the subject he can provide from his own mastery of the subject. Almost every page bristles with excerpts from the great writings of the Fathers and saints, but never in such a way as to overwhelm the reader. And it need hardly be said that, both in what Fr. Arminjon quotes and in what he himself says, refreshingly absent in this book is the modern scepticism which has tainted so many works of eschatology written by authors who, while <u>professing</u> docility to the Church and the inspired word of God, nevertheless seem to place greater trust in the findings and theorizings of modern "scientists" and "enlightened" thinkers.

Father Arminjon follows in the footsteps of the Doctors and other great writers of the Church in his truly Catholic handling

of authorities. If Scripture is unambiguous, he allows it to speak for itself. Where its meaning is doubtful, he gives the understanding of the Fathers. If a matter is uncertain, he tells us that we are free to choose whichever interpretation we prefer, but if the answer is definite he tells us so and confirms what he says with the words of a pope or the unanimous teaching of the Fathers. The saints and great theologians he cites with reverence and with due respect to their relative weight (pride of place among them going, of course, to St. Thomas Aquinas); and even private revelations to privileged souls are also introduced when appropriate, but sparingly and judiciously, accompanied by reminders to treat as certain what is certain and as doubtful what is doubtful, thus avoiding the pitfall of heeding the alleged voice of an unapproved apparition rather than the teaching of Christ's appointed Vicars. And every quotation is cited with its reference - the proof both of the immense breadth of Fr. Arminjon's scholarship and of his painstaking attention to detail.

But again, please do not be put off by phrases like "immense breadth of scholarship" and "painstaking attention to detail." It is these qualities which enable great authors to write with accuracy and clarity; and readability does not have to be - and in this case is not - sacrificed as a result.

Summary of Contents.

The book is divided into nine "conferences" which were originally delivered orally in the presence of the Archbishop of Chambéry and a thrilled congregation.

For many people the first two conferences will be the most enthralling part of the book. In them Fr. Arminjon displays not only the theological mastery which we have already dwelt on, but also a superb sense of history and an excellent understanding of the events of his time and their significance, including a clear notion of the unseen but powerful subversive forces at work in the overthrow of society throughout the world. Indeed it is worthy of note that, even writing when he was, more than thirty years before the First World War, he could foresee what are perhaps the two most significant political events of our present century, the terrible Socialist revolution which was already showing signs of threatening Russia and the subsequent claim - successful of course - of Palestine and Jerusalem by the Jews as their own.

The First Conference opens by refuting those self-confident, infidel braggarts, foreseen by St. Peter in 2 Peter 3:1-4,* who assert that the world will never end, and proves that when wicked-

*"Behold this second epistle I write to you, my dearly beloved,... that you may be mindful of those words which I told you before... knowing this first, that in the last days there shall come deceitful scoffers, walking after their own lusts, saying: Where is His promise or His coming? for since the time that the fathers slept, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation."

ness is at its height God will wreak His vengeance and vindicate the just. Even writing more than a century ago, Fr. Arminjon was able to point to signs in his own day which indicated clearly the relative closeness of the prophesied consummation; and no one who studies the signs he mentions, and takes into account the sway now held by evil over the entire world, could doubt that the events described in the Apocalypse are about to burst on us.

The Second Conference describes the persecution by Antichrist, and other momentous events, such as the return of Henoch and Elias, and draws on and examines the horrifyingly detailed account of these events which - for the consolation of those who remain faithful during the times of which Our Lord has told us that, "unless those days had been shortened, no flesh should be saved" (Matthew 24:22) - was included in Holy Scripture by the decree of Divine Providence. Fr. Arminjon speaks fearlessly, and with many factual details, of the role of the Jews in ushering in the reign of Antichrist by recognizing in him their long-awaited messias, and he points to the evidence - often heavily suppressed even in the 1880's, when he was writing - of the activities of many members of that nation which crucified our Divine Saviour; activities directed towards the subversion of Church and State, according to a programme which in our days has all but come to fruition. Finally Fr. Arminjon shows that it will be the death of Antichrist by Divine intervention that will lead to the conversion of the Jews.

The Third Conference concerns the resurrection of the dead and the General Judgement when all men who have ever lived will be assembled for judgement, the dead rising from their tombs and their long-corrupted bodies being miraculously restored to them. Then, every action, good and bad, of every man will be seen and judged publicly prior to the despatch of the wicked to damnation and the entry of the just into Heaven.

It is the fate of the just which is the subject of the Fourth Conference, but not what they will experience in Heaven, which is the subject of a later Conference. In this Conference are asked and answered such fascinating questions as exactly where eternity will be spent by those blessed souls who will have been reunited with their glorified bodies; whether these same blessed souls will be able to visit the earth and the planets and be in contact with their friends who have also been saved; how they will be able to take advantage of the special qualities of their glorified bodies by travelling with the speed of thought and passing through solid objects as Our Lord passed through the stone which blocked the entrance to His tomb; and so on.

Purgatory - the sufferings of those souls who die with a debt of temporal punishment to be expiated - is the subject of the Fifth Conference, and we feel sure that any reader who thinks that he already knows something of this topic will learn much

more from this chapter. Catholic tradition contains much information about Purgatory which twentieth century Catholics rarely have the opportunity to learn. So vivid is Fr. Arminjon's treatment of the subject that the reader will be given the strongest incentive to avoid, and do penance for, even the tiniest venial sin, and will be forcibly struck with the urgency of his compassionate duty to offer prayers and penances for the holy souls who are in Purgatory at present.

And the Sixth Conference is about Hell. Its location is identified and its pains and torments are analysed, not with the imaginative representation of a poet or artist, but with the exactitude of a true theologian - and we can assure our customers that the reality is vastly more horrific than any fictional depiction could be, especially as our knowledge of the nature of the sufferings of Hell is by no means as vague as some permit themselves to think.

A welcome contrast is provided by the Seventh Conference, which describes the bliss of Heaven - or as much of what constitutes this bliss as can be grasped by our earth-bound intellects - with wonderful clarity. The problem facing anyone who attempts to depict Heaven as closely to its reality as possible, is that Heaven is so far removed from, so much more desirable than, anything we can experience or imagine in this life that it is difficult to make it seem desirable at all, and to avoid making it appear somewhat insipid. This is a problem which Fr. Arminjon triumphantly surmounts. Never, we think we can safely say, will you read a more thrilling and inspiring description of Heaven than his. In his spell-binding prose he fills in every gap and straightens and sharpens every edge, presenting a coherent picture by which every soul not yet sunk in total depravity cannot help being entranced and enthused.

The same applies no less to the Eighth and Ninth Conferences which respectively discuss Christian sacrifice, with special reference to the Mass, as the means of our redemption, and analyse in depth the great mystery of suffering - at once an object of horror and of desire - and the indispensable role that suffering plays in preparing us for future beatitude. If the first two Conferences will be the high spots of the book for some, these last two will be the high spots for others; for in them Fr. Arminjon rises to his full stature as both a profound theologian and a master of the spiritual life.

Finally, there is also included a biographical note on Fr. Arminjon and a Preface which sets out in some detail the history of the book and some observations as to its significance, with special reference to its effect on St. Theresa of Lisieux, the Little Flower.

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PREFACE BY THE PUBLISHERS OF THE ENGLISH EDITION OF 1985

The publishing history of this work, surely one of the greatest and most inspiring masterpieces of Catholic literature to have been written since the Reformation, is sufficiently unusual, and even improbable, to be worth briefly describing.

First published in 1881, shortly before the author's death in 1885, it initially sold well in France, running fairly swiftly through three editions. Moreover, in at least one instance it was explosively influential and effective: as we shall see, if it could ever be said that a single book was the making of a great saint, that can be said of The End of the Present World in respect of St. Theresa of Lisieux.

In a world not dominated by Satan, such proof of the book's ability to inspire to heroic heights of sanctity together with its intrinsic merits would be sufficient to guarantee that it would be internationally renowned and in print in many languages in perpetuity. But we do not live in a world not dominated by Satan, and the reality is that when the third edition was exhausted the book went out of print, not much more than a decade after its first publication; and it was not long before the book and its author were almost completely unknown in France - outside France, as far as we are aware, they had never been known.

And thus, without doubt to the great contentment of Satan, the situation remained for many decades. If the quality of the book itself was not sufficient to prevent it from resting in oblivion, one would have thought that the evidence given in detail in the writings of St. Theresa as to such a major source of her inspiration might have prompted the countless students of her life all over the world to give some consideration to this source of inspiration - might it not be thought possible, after all, that the book could have a comparable effect on others as well? - but, far from being discussed and analysed, it was about fifty years before any of the saint's many biographers went further than to give it more than the briefest of passing mentions.

Evidently Divine providence was not prepared to allow The End of the Present World and Fr. Arminjon to remain in permanent oblivion, however, for in the 1940s a book was published called (translated) Introduction to the Spirituality of St. Theresa of the Child Jesus, and its author, Mgr. Andre Combes, who was a learned historian, finally did what previous biographers of St. Theresa had unaccountably failed to do. In a passage from which we shall shortly be quoting substantial extracts, he paid appropriate attention to the unmistakable evidence that the Little Flower had obligingly left behind for those who wished to analyse her life and learn from it and draw the obvious deductions from it.

If what Mgr. Combes wrote had aroused sufficient interest in Fr. Arminjon's work for the latter to be almost immediately republished, it would not have been surprising, but what is certainly surprising is that it had this result, not at once, but some twenty years later. For by the time it was brought back into print by the Office Central de Lisieux in 1964, "Vatican II" was in full session and, among the vast majority of those who called themselves Catholics, an atmosphere existed which was the reverse of favourable to the many blunt truths so magnificently spelled out by Fr. Arminjon. Indeed the French publishers themselves imply clearly in their introduction that they are not completely happy with the book: "Whether it contains passages which we would not write today, which the author himself would not considerably modify [our emphasis added], is another matter... It is not a book written in 1964." True it is that The End of the Present World was not written in 1964! Nowhere in it is to be found the non-Catholic "oecumenical", salvation-is-not-a-problem mentality that had already taken a firm hold at that time and has been growing ever since.

Scarcely less remarkable than its republication during the "Vatican II" era is the fact that the book then remained in print for some twenty years, even though the publishers evidently found its contents increasingly disturbing. But it is out of print now, and if it ever becomes available in France again it will not be with the help of the Office Central de Lisieux. "Since the book has fallen into the public domain [i.e. is outside the copyright period], we are unable to oppose its publication," they wrote to us in response to our request to include a translation of their Preface in this edition. "But at the same time we do not wish our Preface to be reproduced and we therefore refuse you the authorization to translate and reproduce it. The Conferences do not reflect the ideas of our time... [In particular], certain passages on Judaism raised such a furore in France that the book, of which stocks are now exhausted, will not be republished, anyway by us." (Letter dated 7th November 1985)

It had remained in publication long enough to be brought to our attention, however, and long enough to enable us to form the opinion that, if God would permit, it must be made available to the English-speaking world. Even so, there was a very considerable gap between arriving at such an opinion and putting it into effect; for at today's prices the cost of having a work of this length translated would be completely prohibitive to an organization as small as ours.

However, we were soon to receive evidence that God not only permitted but wished that The End of the Present World be published in English at the present time; for Divine Providence introduced us to Mr. Peter McEnerny who with great generosity undertook to translate the book free of charge, and what you are about to read is the result of three years hard work on his part. In our view the translation is of a quality fully worthy of the original and we should here like to acknowledge, on behalf of ourselves and, we feel sure, on the behalf of all those who will be reading the book, a very great debt of gratitude to him.

* * *

So much for the publication history of the book up to the present day. In relating it we mentioned the work Introduction to the Spirituality of St. Theresa of the Child Jesus, in which the author, Mgr. Andre Combes, provides compelling reasons why The End of the Present World should be read by those who have a concern for the eternal destiny of their immortal souls, and indeed also by those whose present concern in this matter is much less than it ought to be; and we indicated that we would be reproducing extracts from Mgr. Combes' book. This we now do, the (translated) quotations which follow, including the notes, being taken from pages 135 to 158 of the second edition published in Paris by Librairie Vrin in 1948.

* * *

Schooled in the Imitation, little Theresa could only strengthen and develop her idea of a life given entirely to God, and resolved to taste nothing of earthly joys. She found elsewhere the confirmation and doctrinal explanations for which she yearned in her impatience for the joys of Heaven and her paramount esteem for a life wholly consecrated to divine love, in the austerity of the Carmel.

> "At the age of fourteen, in view of my desire for knowledge, God found it necessary to add 'an abundance of oil and honey to the purest flour.' He gave me to taste that oil and honey in the Conferences of Fr. Arminjon on The End of the Present World and the Mysteries of the Future Life. Reading this book immersed my soul in a happiness which is not of this world; I already felt a presentiment of what God holds in store for those who love Him; and, seeing those eternal rewards, so out of proportion to the small sacrifices of this life, I wanted to love, to love Jesus passionately, and to give Him a thousand marks of tenderness, while I was still able."*

In writing these lines, St. Theresa of the Child Jesus rendered the historian of her thought a signal service. As a matter of fact, I do not think that any of those who have concerned themselves with ascertaining what influences lay behind little Theresa Martin sought out that quite forgotten author, Fr. Arminjon. This was a mistake, for the evidence is explicit, and moreover, most precise. Theresa quotes the work which satisfied her desire for knowledge, informs us of the impression she felt on reading it, and sums up, in a few extremely sugg-

* Autobiographical manuscript, f.47.

estive words, the benefits which she is certain that she gained from it. Nothing could be more important for our investigation.*

Missionary Apostolic, honorary canon of Chambery and Aosta, former professor of Sacred Scripture, Church History and Sacred Oratory at the major seminary of Chambery, and member of the Imperial Academy of Savoy, Fr. Arminjon was a highly esteemed preacher in great demand, some of whose addresses, panegyrics and conferences are listed in the Catalogue of Printed Works of the National Library. In 1881, he published, through the Librairie de L'Oeuvre de St. Paul, a volume entitled End of the Present World and Mysteries of the Future Life, containing nine conferences given at Chambery Cathedral and, according to a remarkable foreword, directed at combatting the "fatal error and great evil of our century," which is "the absence of the sense of the supernatural, and the profound neglect of the future life." Explaining his aim, the author added: "Since wise men have found at all times that 'for extreme illnesses, extreme treatments are most fitting,' it seemed to us that the most efficacious remedy with which confidently to fight against the inveterate evil of naturalism, was a lucid, clear, and exact exposition, without any diminution, of the essential truths dealing with the future life and the inevitable termination of human destiny."

How well such an intention corresponded to Theresa's desire, and how illuminating the reader herself henceforth becomes in our eyes!

In fact, it is just as if, having read this book, Theresa had decided: "The best remedy - a treatise? No, rather a life, a wholly supernatural life, always directed entirely towards its eternal future." That, at least, is what St. Theresa did, and her experience shows how much better her demonstration was than her master's.

* [Footnote by Mgr. Combes.] No one in France seems to me to have thought of following Theresa's example and reading Arminjon as she did. Mgr. Laveille (Sainte Therese de l'Enfant Jesus, p.143) quotes the second part of the text which I have just noted, but merely remarks that this book "does not appear to have retained among the Catholic public the esteem in which she held it." Fr. Petitot could write the whole of his most remarkable book Sainte Therese de Lisieux, Une Renaissance Spirituelle, without mentioning Arminjon, even in section 3 of chapter 2, The Spiritual Books of St. Theresa (pp.68-76). Fr. Piat (Histoire d'une Famille, p.263-264) aptly observes: "These conferences mark an important stage in her spiritual life" and it was he who published, for the first time, the lines from Theresa which I quote later ("I copied... my heart") but he does not attempt to state their exact significance. In his review of the first edition of this "Introduction" in the Revue d'Ascetique et de Mystique (no.89, March 1947, p.84-85) Fr. M. Olphe-Galliard, S.J., pointed out that this very problem had been raised in 1928, in Il Conforto, the magazine of the Camillan Fathers of Verona, in a series of articles by Fr. Alghisio Daniele del Bon entitled Il Paradiso Visto Altraverso la "Storia d'un' Anima".

Nevertheless, the fact that the author of such a book was able to satisfy the appetite of such a reader, to immerse her soul in a supernatural happiness, and to respond to her expectation by teaching her authoritatively what God reserves eternally for those who love Him and what a disproportion there is between the divine rewards and the sacrifices by which they are purchased; the fact that he was able in addition to inspire, in a soul already so elevated, the will to love Jesus passionately, remains, for this all too much forgotten orator, not only a title to fame, but also a right to the gratitude of all devoted followers of St. Theresa, and so of the whole Church. For it was in his company that Theresa's life acquired its definitive direction; it was to him that she owed the doctrinal support which set her mind at ease and developed the spontaneous impulse of her heart; and it was her acquaintance with his writings which was responsible even for some of the features of her style, and her tendency to set no limits to her desires. "May we contribute," said Fr. Arminjon, on 8th May 1881, "towards making Our Lord Jesus Christ and His Church loved, and inculcate more and more in those who read our work this cardinal truth: 'To serve God and keep His commandments is the whole of man.'"*

How this desire was fulfilled! The book must have struck Theresa with great force, particularly in its seventh conference, "Eternal bliss and the supernatural vision of God." As we think of this influence, we cannot be unmoved on reading pages such as the following:

> "As no mother ever loved her dearest son, the Lord loves His predestinate. He is jealous of His dignity, and in any competition in dedication and generosity He cannot permit Himself to be outdone by His creature. Ah, the Lord cannot forget that the saints, when they once lived on earth, rendered Him complete homage and dedicated entirely to Him their rest, their rejoicing and their whole being, and would have wished to have an inexhaustible supply of blood in their veins, in order to shed it as a living and unfailing pledge of their faith; that they would have desired a thousand hearts in their breasts in order to consume them in an inextinguishable fervour of love, and to possess a thousand bodies, in order to deliver them over to martyrdom as victims unceasingly renewed. And the grateful God cries out: '<u>Now it is My turn!</u> To the gift which the saints have given me of themselves, can I respond otherwise than by giving Myself, without measure or restriction? If I place in their hands the sceptre of creation and bathe them in the torrents of my light, that is a great deal. It is going further than their hopes and expectations would

* See page xvi.

> ever have aspired; but it is not the utmost endeavour of My Heart. I owe them more than Paradise, more than the treasures of My knowledge; I owe them My life, My nature, My eternal and infinite substance. If I bring My servants and friends into My house, if I console them and make them quiver with joy, pressing them in the embrace of My charity, this will quench their thirst and their desires superabundantly, and more than is necessary for the perfect repose of their hearts; but it is not enough for the contentment of My divine Heart, for the quenching and perfect satisfaction of My love. I must be the soul of their soul, I must penetrate and imbue them in My Divinity, just as fire absorbs iron, and I must unite Myself to them in an eternal face to face, showing Myself to their minds, unclouded and unveiled, without the intervention of the senses. My glory must illuminate them, exude and shine through all the pores of their being, so that, "knowing Me as I know them, they may become gods themselves."'*

To bring that influence to light it was enough to assemble Theresa's testimony as found in The Story of a Soul and to grant it the importance which it deserves. Two of Theresa's unpublished fragments,** which I am able to add to these pages, confirm my conclusion and render its full significance clear.

> "This book had been lent to Papa by my dear Carmelites; so, contrary to my usual practice (for I did not read Papa's books), I asked to read it.
>
> "This book was one of the greatest graces in my life. I read it at the window of my study, and the impression which it made upon me is too intimate and sweet for me to express. I copied out several passages about perfect love and the welcome which God will give His elect when He Himself will become their great and eternal reward. I kept on saying the loving words which had enkindled my heart. All the great truths of religion and the mysteries of eternity entranced me."

Here is one of the passages copied out by Theresa. Taken from the fifth Conference "On Purgatory" (p.205), it is given as a quotation from St. John Chrysostom with no precise reference. Theresa had kept it in the Manuel du Chretien, which she used at the Carmel. It is still there.

* See page 142.

** They are now integrated into The Story of a Soul, and are, naturally, to be found in the autobiographical manuscripts.

> "The man who is inflamed with the fire of divine love is as indifferent to glory and ignominy as if he were alone on earth and unseen. He spurns temptation. He is no more troubled by suffering than he would be if it were borne in a body other than his own. What is full of sweetness for the world has no attraction for him, He is no more liable to be ensnared by any attachment to creatures than gold, seven times tested, is liable to rust. Such are, even on earth, the effects of divine love when it takes firm hold of a soul."
>
> 30th May, 1887.*

We also know that, while at the Carmel, Theresa advised her sister Celine to have a person whose faith was shaken read the Conferences of Fr. Arminjon.** We can appreciate this reliance even better when we meet Theresa and Celine at the Belvedere. For the present, here is a clarification of a singular, historical misunderstanding. Not long ago, a biographer, who sought to be incisive and candid, diagnosed an immense pride in Theresa of Lisieux, for the conclusive reason that she "ended up writing - and this caps everything else - 'He (God) knows that it is the only way to prepare us to know Him as He knows Himself, and to <u>become gods ourselves</u>.'"***

A strange objectivity, which takes scandal out of ignorance! In the first place, it is not correct to say that Theresa ended <u>up</u> in this folly: that is how she began. The phrase for which she is reproved Theresa really did write, and underline, in her third letter to Celine, 23rd July 1888.****

However, in writing this phrase, the young Carmelite simply proves that she was still under the spell of what she was reading, before leaving the world; and what delighted her in the writings of Fr. Arminjon was the most authentic echo of Scripture and Tradition. To grasp the psychology of the saints, no sympathy can suffice that does not take care to discover the actual doctrine by which they live.

* Carmel of Lisieux Documentation. Theresa herself dated her copy.

** Cf. Letter CVI to Celine, 3rd April 1891.

*** <u>Sainte Therese de Lisieux</u> by Lucie Delarue-Mardrus: p.93

**** Cf. <u>The Story of a Soul</u>, p.318, date corrected by Carmel of Lisieux Documentation.

In the next extract Mgr. Combes sets out the precious confidential details which Celine (Sister Genevieve of the Holy Face) related about what she called the "Belvedere conversations," that is, the conversations which the two sisters, Theresa and Celine, had around Pentecost, 1887, as together they read The End of the Present World on the balcony of the upper room (the Belvedere) at the "Buissonnets".

> "It seems to me," said Theresa in The Story of a Soul, "that we received very great graces. As the Imitation says, God at times communicates Himself amidst brilliant splendour; at other times, softly veiled in shadows or figures. Thus did He condescend to show Himself to our hearts; but how transparent and light that veil was! Doubt would have been impossible; faith and hope departed from our souls, as love made us find on earth Him whom we had been seeking."

The value of such a disclosure can hardly be exaggerated. What credence should be accorded to it?

When asked how accurate it was, the other actress in these scenes from Earth and Heaven, Celine, or rather, the venerable Sister Genevieve of the Holy Face, was pleased to declare the following:

> "Those conversations at the Belvedere left such a profound and clear memory in me that I remember them as if it were yesterday. What Theresa wrote about them in The Story of a Soul not only does not appear exaggerated, but seems rather an understatement. We really did live through hours of heavenly consolation. What words could describe them? Often we would begin by repeating, with unimaginable fervour, the words of St. John of the Cross: 'Lord! To suffer and be despised for you.' Yes, to this we aspired with all our strength. Then we would think of Heaven, and repeat to one another the words of Fr. Arminjon: 'And the grateful God calls out: Now it is My turn.'* Then, as it were, we left the earth for eternal life. As our saint wrote, faith and hope disappeared, and we possessed God in love. After so many years, I can declare that it was not a flash in the pan or a passing enthusiasm, but an irresistible impulse towards God. It seems to me that we were no longer in this world. It was ecstasy."

In explanation of this term, which seemed to her the only one capable of expressing such a state, Sister Genevieve added:

> "This ecstasy did not leave us unconcious, nor raise us above the ground. I can still see Theresa clasping my hands, I can see her lovely eyes filled with tears. It was the ecstasy of St. Augustine and St. Monica at Ostia."**

* "What a rewarding text for a historian." [Footnote by Mgr. Combes]

** Carmel of Lisieux Documentation.

Such was, moreover, the opinion of Theresa herself. Here is what I have just learnt that she observed, on this point, in her unpublished reminiscences:

> "I do not know whether I am mistaken, but it seems to me that the outpouring of our souls was like that of St. Monica with her son at the port of Ostia, when they were lost in ecstasy at the sight of the wonders of the Creator. I think that we received graces of as high an order as those granted to the great saints."

Such an impression, in a soul so humble, such a convergence of testimony, permit of no doubt in the mind of the historian. Theresa - and her sister, for Theresa's solitary life began only at the Carmel - received, at the Belvedere, unitive graces binding her to God by sensible love which, whatever system of spiritual theology one professes, seem fully to deserve the name of "mystical" and which, in Theresa's interior journey, assume the character of pathos and form around it, as it were, a fiery reflection. The faith and hope of these two children having reached their climax, their charity grows to such an extent that it almost brings about in their souls the elimination of self which is its characteristic, and which opens the way to the Beatific Vision. Superseding, by its very intensity, all obscure perceptions and hidden desires - an act of possession so immediate, so complete and captivating that it compels recognition as a manifestation of God, present and Himself vouching for His presence - it leaves practically no room for those earthly virtues of hope and faith."

In the last extract from his book that we are reproducing Mgr. Combes first notes that in July 1889 Theresa wrote to Celine:

> "It is a great martyrdom to love Jesus, without feeling the sweetness of that love, it is a martyrdom... Well, let us die martyrs... Oh, Celine...gentle echo of my soul, do you understand?... Unseen martyrdom, known to God above, which the creature's eye cannot discover, martyrdom without honour or triumph... That is love carried through to heroism. But, one day, God will gratefully exclaim: 'Now, it is My turn.'"*

It would have been impossible for her to have anticipated her historian with greater generosity and kindness! So Theresa took the trouble of writing down at least once the phrase which she had read enthusiastically from Fr. Arminjon's pen, as a guaran-

* Letter LXXII to Celine, 14th July 1889.

tee to us that, at a certain time, she really did make it the guiding theme of her interior life, the foundation of her hope and the stimulus for all her sacrifices."*

(End of extracts from Introduction to the Spirituality of St. Theresa of the Child Jesus by Mgr. A. Combes.)

It was those passages by Mgr. Coombes - according to the Foreword to the French edition which we were refused permission to translate and reproduce - which decided the Office Central de Lisieux to republish the book.** We suggest that they should be sufficient to persuade any reader to take the book with the utmost seriousness.

* * *

We must now say a few words on the editing policy we have adopted with this book.

It is our belief that a publisher's overriding aim with a work such as this should be fidelity to the original and in particular we have been determined not to abridge it in any way, despite the pressures of cost in reproducing it in full and the reluctance of many people today to read a book of any significant length. Occasionally, however, difficulties arose from the fact that The End of the Present World, although a masterpiece, is not entirely without flaws. In one or two passages, for instance, Fr. Arminjon allows himself to be beguiled into giving, quite unnecessarily for his purpose, summaries of hypotheses advanced by scientists of the nineteenth century, as in our own century, in the guise of accepted scientific facts, and into presenting them as though they were scientific facts; sometimes his Scriptural quotations are not completely accurate; and once or twice even clear theological errors occur. The "scientific" passages we were tempted to omit completely; but we decided that the integrity of the translation as a translation must take precedence over the elimination of errors of this kind, and we therefore restricted ourselves to drawing attention to them in footnotes. In the case of one error in theology,

* [Footnote by Mgr. Combes] A year before this letter, Theresa had already written to Celine, on 23rd July 1888, a year after the Belvedere conversations: "He is not far away. He who watches, He who begs this sorrow and agony of us, is close at hand. He needs it for souls, for our souls. He wants to give us such a beautiful reward! His ambitions for us are so great, but how will He be able to say My Turn, if our turn has not come, if we have not given Him anything?"

** In the same Foreword the French publishers draw attention to a coincidence of dates which gives unmistakable indication of the book's electrifying effect on St. Theresa. The book was lent to her by her father in May 1887 and it was on 29th of May in the same year that she obtained her father's consent to enter the Carmelite convent in Lisieux at the age of fifteen.

FOREWORD BY FR. ARMINJON

Dear Reader,

It has seemed to us that one of the most melancholy fruits of rationalism, the fatal error and great plague of this century, the pestilential source whence our revolutions and social disasters arise, is the absence of the sense of the supernatural and the profound neglect of the great truths of the future life. "With desolation shall the earth be laid waste," because the majority of men, fascinated by the lure of fleeting pleasures, and absorbed in their worldly interests and the care of their material affairs, no longer fix their thoughts on the great principles of the Faith, and stubbornly refuse to retire within themselves. It may be said of our present generation what the prophet Daniel said, in his time, of the two old men of Babylon: "They perverted their own mind and turned away their eyes that they might not look unto Heaven nor remember just judgements."[1]

The two causes of this terrifying indifference and profound, universal lethargy are, obviously, ignorance and the unrestrained love of sensual pleasures which, by darkening the interior eye of the human soul, bring all its aspirations down to the narrow level of the present life, and cut it off from the vision of the beauties and rewards to come. Now, since wise men have found at all times that, "for extreme illnesses, extreme treatments are most fitting," it seemed to us that the most efficacious remedy with which to fight confidently against the inveterate evil of naturalism was a lucid, clear and exact exposition, without diminution, of the essential truths dealing with the future life and the inevitable termination of human destiny.

Perhaps we shall be accused of expressing this or that assertion of ours too crudely and starkly, and of broaching the most serious and formidable points of Christian doctrine, without, at the same time, modifying and softening them so as to adapt them to the prejudices or apathy of certain souls, unacquainted with such grave considerations - like a physician who carefully allows only a limited amount of light to a sick friend, in order not to hurt his painful eyes by excessive glare. However in the religious and supernatural order the phenomena and effects wrought upon the soul are often the reverse of those which occur in the physical and material order. In the visible world, an excessive amount of light dazzles: it leads to dimness of vision and causes blindness. On the other hand, as soon as the mind enters the intellectual realm, and is transported into the vast sphere of invisible and uncreated matter, excess is no longer to be feared. Jesus Christ is the great luminary of our intellects, the food and life of our hearts: He is never

[1] Daniel 13:9.

better understood, or more loved, than when He manifests Himself liberally in the integrity of His doctrine and the supereminent splendours of His divine personality. The example of the Apostles, announcing the Gospel amidst the twilight of paganism, and boldly preaching "Jesus Christ crucified" before the Roman Senate and amidst the philosophers of the Areopagus, is enough to tell us that truth is attractive to souls naturally Christian, and that it enlightens and convinces them only insofar as it is presented to them in all its strength and all its clarity. Our trial is limited in its duration to the period of the present life. If, as the rationalists maintain, this life is only a link in the chain of our destiny, and if the course of time wherein man is subject to strife, temptation and the blandishments of the senses and of creatures should continue indefinitely, then Jesus Christ will never be king, virtue brings no hope, and evil will remain eternally triumphant. Thus it is quite certain that the scene which is being played here below will, sooner or later, reach its climax and end. Mankind will then enter upon a new phase of existence, and all that we cherish, all that we search after in this present life, will be less than a shadow, sheer inanity. This is a certain fact, which all our discoveries and the marvels of our genius will not be able to set aside. Now the moral value of life is determined by the end to which it tends, just as the utility of a road is estimated by the traveller only insofar as it helps to bring him more surely and directly to the final point of the journey he has undertaken. Accordingly, to deal with the future life and the last ends is really to expound the science and philosophy of human life, setting out the fundamental principles on which the whole of perfection and morality is based.

The volume of our conferences which we are publishing is a continuation of the one which we brought out, three years ago, on the *Reign of God*. The reign of God is inaugurated, grows and comes to its completion in the course of time; it will not be perfect and consummated until the age to come. So, instead of giving our book the title *End of the Present World and Mysteries of the Future Life*, we could, with equal justice, have called it *The Triumph of Jesus Christ and His Church in the Future Life*.

Our arguments and maxims on the vanity of the "figure of this passing world," the futility of all undertakings conceived outside the perspective of the Faith and not having the final end as their aim, the irremediable misfortune reserved for the wicked, and our other subjects - the advent and reign of Antichrist and the temple of immortality, the rewards destined for the just, the restoration of fallen man through the law of sacrifice and the purifying crucible of suffering - seemed useful to us in order to shed the salve of consolation upon wounded and embittered hearts, to lift up disheartened and dejected souls and, in the calamitous and troubled days through which we are living, to help Christians become men of "Sursum", by inspiring them with resignation and patience; in order, furthermore, to strengthen them amidst the present sorrows, by raising up their hopes and desires towards a better fatherland.

By drawing upon the pure founts of Tradition and the Fathers and instructing ourselves by the light of Holy Scripture, we have sought to satisfy the anxious and troubled souls of our time, and to offer them the true solution to the mysteries of life as taught to us by Christianity. May we contribute to making Jesus Christ and His Church loved, and to inculcating more and more in those who read our work this cardinal truth: "To serve God and keep His commandments is the whole of man!"

Chambery,

Feast of the Apparition of St. Michael
the Archangel, 8th May 1881.

THE END OF THE PRESENT WORLD

AND

THE MYSTERIES OF THE FUTURE LIFE

FIRST CONFERENCE

The end of the world. - The signs which will precede and the circumstances which will accompany it.

> Veniet dies Domini sicut fur, in quo coeli magno impetu transient.
>
> But the day of the Lord shall come as a thief, in which the heavens shall pass away with great violence. (1 Peter 3:10)

Saint Paul teaches us that the present world is an immense laboratory where all nature is in ferment and labour until the day when, freed from all bondage and corruption, it will blossom out into a radiant and renewed order.[1]

Man himself, in his course here below, is no more than a traveller, sailing across the fluctuating, tempestuous sea of time, and the earth which bears him is but the boat destined to guide him towards the land of immortal and unending life.

Nations, too, like individuals, are destined one day to disappear.

The story of mankind would be no more than an inexplicable drama, a series of confused, aimless, isolated facts, if, sooner or later, it did not have its appointed time and climax. In the present natural order, everything with a beginning is destined to end; a continuous chain must have a link at both ends, not just one. The present world, precisely because it was created, necessarily tends towards its conclusion and end.

How will that great transformation be effected? What will be the conditions and the new form of our earth when, after it has been destroyed and completely transfigured by fire, it will no longer be watered by the sweat of man, and has ceased to be the troubled, blood-stained arena of our strife and passions? We shall speak of this presently.

In this first talk, our aim will be to recall the testimony of Holy Scripture and, particularly, that of

[1] Romans 8:21,22.

to-day's Gospel,* which assure us that, after a longish period of centuries, the visible order of things on earth will give way to a new and permanent order, and the changing era of time will be replaced by the era of stability and repose.

As we broach this delicate and difficult subject, one of the most important that can be treated in Christian preaching, since it touches upon the present and future circumstances of our country and our destinies, it seems right to us to point out that we shall steer clear of every perilous opinion, relying neither upon dubious revelations nor apocryphal prophecies, and making no assertion which is not justified by the doctrine of the Sacred Books, or permitted by the authentic teaching of the Fathers and of tradition.

In the first four conferences we shall recall in turn: first, what the premonitory signs and indications of the end of the times are to be; secondly, what will be the marks and nature of the persecution by this man of sin, announced by the Apostle as the precursor of the final coming of the Son of God; thirdly, what will be the circumstances of the resurrection and judgement; finally, what will be the place of immortal life and the state of the world after the resurrection.

To-day, in our commentary on Sacred Scripture, and, particularly, on the 24th chapter of Saint Matthew, we shall seek to resolve these three fundamental questions:

First: Is the doctrine of the end of the times an indubitable doctrine, founded on reason and in harmony with the facts of present-day science?

Secondly: May we deduce from the words of Christ whether the end of the times is near or remote?

Thirdly: By what means will this final cataclysm, this great crowning change, come about?

In the face of these formidable problems which defy the light and grasp of human understanding, our voice is hesitant, and can only stammer. May your blessing, my Lord Bishop, strengthen it.[2] May the spirit of God enlighten our mind, and place on our lips words of truth, strength, wisdom and discretion!

I

The materialistic, atheistic science of our century, the sort which is propagated in magazines, taught from most official rostrums and given credence by the mainstream of present-day anti-Christian opinion, persists in regarding the order and perfection of the universe merely as the result of chance. It affirms that matter is eternal... Denying creation, it could not logically admit that the world can have an end. According to this false science,

* Note by the publishers of the English edition. It appears that this "conference" or lecture was originally delivered on the last Sunday after Pentecost when the Gospel is Matthew 24:15-35.

the present universe will always subsist or, if it becomes progressively better, this will be solely through the effect of man's genius, the increasing impulse given to the arts and industrial achievements, the varied combination and play of fluids and elements, decomposing and reconstituting themselves to give birth to new forms - in short, by the application and activation of the innumerable and still unknown forces which nature conceals in her bosom; forces which, by themselves, are capable of surging forward into limitless and indefinite growth; and, just as the worm, in perfecting itself, turned into a quadruped, from quadruped to two-footed creature, from two-footed creature to man, in the same way, man, with the aid of science, will one day attain the pinnacle of his sovereignty. He will conquer time and space, make himself wings in order to propel himself towards the stars, and explore the wonders of the constellations. In the eyes of atheistic science, paradise and eternal life, as conceived by Christians, are an allegory and a myth. Progress is the last end, the law and foundation of the life of man, the final point and aim where all his thoughts and aspirations should converge. Let man courageously cast aside the bonds and darkness of superstition and of oppressive outdated beliefs, let him have faith in himself alone, and, in a more or less proximate future, he will be invested with an unlimited, unrestrained kingship over the elements and creation. Nature, completely subdued by his genius, will then open like the horn of plenty upon a new humanity, pouring forth the fullness of desirable goods; and if the present generations fail to attain this ideal of bliss, they may take comfort from the prospect that it will be the attribute of some more distant descendants, and all the more glorious for these, in that they will have acquired them independently, and without the assistance of God, and will be solely the result of their own perseverance, efforts and ingenuity.

Need I say that these fantasies, these crass, nonsensical theories, are contradicted by reason and the common assent of all nations?

They are contradicted by Christian reason. If, in fact, as our Christian faith and conviction tell us, temporal life had its principle and beginning in God, it must also have in God its consummation and destiny. Man was created to know, love and serve God; and, if he did not succeed one day in possessing Him and being irrevocably united with Him, the Creator's plan, devoid of any rational end, would be no more than a strange aberration. Mankind, thwarted in its love, its tendencies and aspirations, would become another Sisyphus, or a sort of roulette ball, dancing in the air and condemned to spin forever on the wheel of fate's blind necessity. What place would there be for justice, morality, the security of families and of public authority, in a system where everything was in a state of disorder and contradiction, where the ideal never became reality, good was never separated from evil, and no standard existed by which to decide the importance of moral living and the true sanction of human acts?

"History," a sceptical author of our time has said, "is the judge of peoples, and her judgement, which continues throughout the ages, renders the Last Judgement pointless and superfluous."

Our reply will be that the judgement of history is not a public judgement, whereas the evil is public and rises up with an arrogance which is a scandal to men and a constant outrage against God. The judgement of history remains incomplete, because every good or bad act is a

mainspring of good or evil, a seed of life or death, all the fruits and results of which its author could neither feel nor foresee. That is why, if the universal judgement had not been foretold to us, it would be our duty to demand it, to insist on it as a necessary consequence, as the final enactment of that divine Providence which guides the movement of history throughout the ages, and as a final measure to complete His work and place His seal on it.

This universal judgement is but the last scene of the universal drama: the general fulfilment of all the partial judgements emanating from God's justice. It is only on this understanding that history becomes clear and comprehensible, that we shall see it, not as the confused mind and eyes of man imagine it to be, but as it really is, like a book open to every eye.[3]

A great orator of our time has said: "History is not over, it will begin in the valley of Josaphat."

Christian reason and the common assent of all nations thus bear witness that the world must end and that there will be a new order. This truth is also in conformity with science and observed facts.

It is a recognized principle, and a general law of nature, that everything which is subject to movement or decomposition, everything consumed by time or limited in extent, is liable to wear out and age, and, in the end, disappears and perishes. Science teaches us that no vital force, or created agent, has the power to deploy its energy beyond a limited duration, and that, by virtue of the creative law, the field of its activity is restricted within a given sphere, the boundary of which cannot be crossed. The most perfect and soundly-built organisms could not be made to function indefinitely.

Not only living beings, such as animals and plants, but even minerals, are subject to opposing forces of affinity or repulsion, and tend continuously to separate in order to form new groupings. Thus, the hardest rocks and granite undergo corrosion and weathering which, sooner or later, will bring them tumbling down. Stars are seen to extinguish and vanish in the firmament. Every movement, even that of the heavens, tends to become slower. Eminent astronomers have detected, in the sun and the stars, losses of heat and light, admittedly imperceptible, which nevertheless will not fail, after the passage of many centuries, to have a disastrous effect on our climate and seasons. Be that as it may, it is certain that our earth no longer possesses the same fecundity or vegetative strength which it had in the first ages of the human race. Just as the world had its youth, so there will come a time when the world will have its twilight, when it will hasten towards its evening and decline.

These are truths of observation and common sense which reason grasps easily, but Christianity alone has succeeded in demonstrating their certainty and excellence. "It is in this respect," a Protestant thinker has said, "that Christian doctrine is quite distinct from philosophic doctrines. It affirms that a new existence awaits man after this life. An absolute requirement for the fulfilment of that existence is that nature, which has become obscure and impenetrable to man, should be explained and clarified in some future state, which will prove the harmony between visible and invisible things,

[3] Hettinger: Apologie du Christianisme, vol.4, ch.16.

the transient and the everlasting, matter and spirit. "Only in that future, only with such an end to human existence, can the conscience of man find repose. For this hope we are indebted to Christ, whose promise permits us to expect, after the final crisis, a new earth and new heavens."[4]

So, the world will have an end; but is this end remote or near? That is a serious, exciting question, no less worthy of reflection by Christian souls.

Holy Scripture on this point does not leave us completely in the dark. Certainly, speaking of the exact date, Jesus Christ says: "But of that day and hour no one knoweth; no, not the angels of heaven, but the Father alone." On the other hand, He consented to give definite signs and indications, intended to let us know that the fulfilment of the prophecies is close, and that the world is nearing its end.

Jesus Christ has proceeded, in respect of mankind considered as a whole, in the same way as with individuals: thus, our death is certain, but the hour is unknown to us. None of us can say whether he will be living a week or a day from now, and I who am speaking to you do not know whether I shall complete the talk which I have begun. But, if we can be taken by surprise at any time, there are, nevertheless, signs which attest that our final hour is imminent, and that we should be labouring under a crass illusion if we imagined that we had a long stretch of life still awaited here below.

Our Lord tells us: "From the fig-tree learn a parable: When the branch thereof is now tender and the leaves come forth, you know that the summer is nigh. So you also, when you shall see all these things (wars, famines, earthquakes), know ye that it is nigh, even at the doors."[5]

As a matter of fact, these public calamities and disturbances, and the alterations in the elements and in the normal course of the seasons, which will mark the final coming of the Son of God, are vague, indefinite signs... They have appeared, with greater or lesser intensity, in every ill-fated period of human history, and in all periods of crisis and religious disorder.

At the time of the Machabees, signs were already seen in the sky. For forty days, the whole city of Jerusalem observed men on horseback in the air, clad in gold brocade and armed with lances, like cavalry units. The horses, drawn up in squadrons, charged one another. The men seemed to be armed with javelins and drawn swords; their weapons were made of gold, and their helmets and breastplates were dazzling. The terror-stricken people prayed fervently to God, in order that these omens might turn to their deliverance, and not to their confusion and ruin.[6]

During the siege of Jerusalem, under Titus, the Holy of Holies and the Temple were shaken by mysterious movements; strange noises were heard coming from them, and voices from invisible beings cried out: "Let us depart hence, let us depart hence." A Grand Rabbi, dumbfounded by these terrifying, supernatural manifestations, ex-

[4] Schelling: Philosophie de la Revelation, vol.2, p.222.

[5] Matthew 24:32,33.

claimed: "O Temple, why are you troubled, and why do you frighten yourself?" Accordingly, in order not to give rise to any misunderstanding or any false interpretation, Christ tells us that the afflictions and prodigies of nature, which will mark the latter ages of mankind, are only the prelude and beginning of still greater sorrows: Haec autem omnia initia sunt dolorum.[7]

Thus, no firm conclusion can be drawn from the present disasters and revolutions, or the great religious or social cataclysms of which Europe and the world are currently the scene, regarding the end of the times.

The signs to-day are the same signs which occurred in ancient times, and experience shows that they are insufficient to prove the proximity of the judgement.

Nevertheless, it is worth bearing in mind that Christ, in His prophecy (Matthew 24), mingles together in a single scene the signs relating to the end of the world and those relating to the destruction of Jerusalem. He does so, first, because of the analogy between the two events... Secondly, because in God there is no distinction or succession in time. The impending events and those more remote are clearly present to His mind, and He sees them as if they had occurred at the same moment... Moreover, Our Lord Jesus Christ knew that the Apostles, before they were enlightened by the Holy Ghost, were imbued with illusions and all the Jewish prejudices; in their eyes, Jerusalem was the whole universe, and its ruin meant, for them, the collapse of the world. As a result of this narrow, exaggerated patriotism which dominated them, the Apostles continued in their vigilant and unceasing anticipation until the ruin of Jerusalem. Such were the dispositions which Christ endeavoured to arouse, seeking to instruct them, and lead them away from gross earthly hopes, rather than excite their curiosity by disclosing to them the hidden secrets of the future.

Hence, in His prophecy, He shows them, as it were, two perspectives and two horizons, having analogous features and alike in relief, pattern and colouring. In Saint Matthew and Saint Mark, the two events - the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world - seem rather to be merged. In Saint Luke, the two occurrences are very clearly distinguished: there are features which refer solely to the end of the world, such as these:

"And there shall be signs in the sun and in the moon and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, by reason of the confusion of the roaring of the sea and of the waves; men withering away for fear and expectation of what shall come upon the whole world. For the powers of heaven shall be moved. And then they shall see the Son of man coming in a cloud, with great power and majesty."[8]

Will the world last another hundred years? Will it end with our present millennium? Will mankind, under the Christian law of grace, go through a span of years corresponding to the period passed under the law of nature or the Mosaic law? These are questions upon which no hypo-

[7] Matthew 24:8.

[8] Luke 21:25-27.

thesis or conjecture may be ventured. All the calculations and enquiries in which learned interpreters have indulged are idle quests, lacking any purpose other than the satisfaction of vain curiosity. Providence has ordained that this day should not be known, and that nobody shall succeed in discovering it until it actually arrives: "De die illa nemo scit."[9]

And let no one object that, if we cannot assign the day, we can at least determine the period or the year. No; for St. Augustine remarks that the word "day", in Holy Scripture, is to be understood in the sense of any length of time. The testimony of the holy Doctor concurs with that of the Prophet Malachias, who tells us: "Ecce venit, dicit Dominus exercituum: Et quis poterit cogitare diem adventus ejus?"[10] Zacharias is still more precise and explicit: "Et erit in die illa: non erit lux, sed frigus et gelu, et erit dies una, quae nota est Domino, non dies neque nox: et in tempore vesperi erit lux."[11]

The reason is that the end of the world will not simply be the effect of some natural cause, but depends above all on the will of God, which has not been revealed to us.

It is of faith that human destinies will be brought to a close when the measure of saints shall have been filled up, and the number of the elect consummated. Now no man, whether from reasons which are certain, or even on the strength of probable conjecture, can know the number of the predestinate, still less the time which will elapse before this number is complete. Who, for example, would dare to assert whether more or fewer men will be saved in the centuries to come than were saved in the preceding centuries? And irrespective of whether the number of future saints is greater or less than the number of past saints, how is it possible to predict the length of time in which their number will be consummated? Is it not an established fact in the life of the Church that there are periods of sterility when saints are rare, and periods of fecundity when they abound? That is why, considering the original cause of the world, which is none other than the hidden mystery of predestination, no one can conclude whether the end of the world is near or distant.[12]

[9] Matthew 24:36.

[10] Malachias 3:1,2.

[11] Zacharias 14:6,7.

[12] St. Augustine teaches that the angels know the number of predestinate: but it does not follow that they know how long the world will last, as they cannot know in what space of time the number of the predestinate will be complete. Elsewhere, he qualifies this opinion by saying that the angels do not know absolutely the number of the predestinate, but simply how many elect are needed to fill the ranks left empty by the fall of the bad angels. Now, men are not raised to the state of bliss solely in order to replace the fallen angels, but in accordance with a plan and an intention antecedent to the fall of the angels; from which it follows that there may be more men saved than angels fallen. (Suarez: vol.XIX, p.1022)

However, if Christ teaches us that this final great day is a secret which God, in the designs of His sovereignty, has kept to Himself, "tempora et momenta quae Pater posuit in sua potestate," and which will defy all our calculations until the very hour of its fulfilment, nevertheless, in order to forearm us against negligence and a false sense of security, He unceasingly reminds men: first, that the end of the world is certain; secondly, that it is relatively proximate; thirdly, that it will not occur until there have come to pass, not ordinary, habitual signs, such as have happened at all times, but the particular, distinctive signs which He has clearly indicated to us. These signs are not just calamities and revolutions in the stars, but events of a public character, pertaining to both the religious and the social order, which mankind cannot fail to perceive.

II

The first of the events foreshadowing the end of the times is the one to which the Saviour refers in Matthew 24 when He says: "And this Gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a testimony to all nations; and then shall the consummation come." The second of these signs will be the appearance of the man of sin, the Antichrist.[13] The third: the conversion of the Jewish people, who will adore the Lord Jesus and recognize Him as the promised Messias.[14] Until then, says St. Paul, "...let no man deceive you by any means...as if the day of the Lord were at hand."[15]

It is evident that the last two events, which St. Paul declares are to mark the approach of the great tribulation, have not so far been fulfilled. Antichrist has not yet appeared, as we shall show in the next discourse. The Jews, as a nation, have not yet cast off the thick veil which prevents them from acclaiming as God Him Whom they crucified. It remains to be ascertained whether, at the present time, the Gospel has been preached all over the earth, and given for a testimony to the totality of nations.

On this point the Fathers and Doctors are divided. Some say that the words of Christ are to be interpreted morally, and should be understood in the sense of a partial, summary preaching: for them to be fulfilled, it is enough that missionaries should have enlightened a certain number of individual minds in the various parts of the inhabited earth, and that, on each deserted and remote hill-side, the Cross should have been raised at least once. Others, more numerous, like St. Jerome and Bede, insist that the words of the Son of God should be understood in the strictest and most literal sense.

[13] 2 Thessalonians 2:2,3,4.

[14] Romans 11:14,15,16,17.

[15] 2 Thessalonians 2:2.

Cornelius a Lapide, the most learned of the interpreters of the Sacred Books, expresses the opinion that the end of the times will not come until Christianity has been not only proclaimed and propagated, but established and organized, and has subsisted at the level of a public institution, among men of every race and nationality: in such a way that, before the centuries have run their course, there will not be a single barbarian shore, not one island lost in the ocean or any place, at present unknown, in the two hemispheres, where the Gospel has not shone in all its splendour, where the Church has not made herself manifest in her legislation, her solemnities and hierarchy, including the bishops and lower clergy - in a word, where the great prophecy "There will be one fold and one shepherd" has not been completely fulfilled.[16]

We incline to this latter opinion. It is more in harmony with the testimony of Holy Scripture. It is more in accord with the wisdom and mercy of God, who makes no distinction between the civilized and the barbarian, Greeks and Jews, but, desiring the salvation of all men, does not exclude any of them from the light and gift of the Redemption. Finally, it accords better with the ways of Providence, which shows an equal solicitude for all peoples, and calls them in turn to the knowledge of its law, in the time appointed by its immutable decrees.

One need only glance at a map to recognize that the Gospel law is far from having been promulgated to all peoples, and that innumerable multitudes at the present time remain sunk in darkness, and do not possess the slightest shadow of revealed truth.

Thus, Central Asia and the mountains of Tibet have so far defied the endeavours of our most intrepid missionaries. No one has yet been able to give us an exact account of the social and religious customs of the peoples of Equatorial Africa, in spite of the recent discovery of great lakes and high table-land where, formerly, there was held to be nothing but sand and desert. Britain and other nations have established colonial outposts on the shores of the South Sea islands, but the interior of these vast continents has yet to be explored.

Clearly, the Gospel has not yet been preached as a testimony to all nations! Can we even say that it has been preached with sufficient lustre, and in such a way as to leave with no excuse those who, over the greater part of the earth, in all the provinces of India and China and in most of the archipelagoes, have refused to obey it? What would be the effect of twenty, a hundred or, if you wish, a thousand priests, in evangelizing a country like France, implanting knowledge of our divine mysteries and stirring up the fire of charity? China alone, in view of its immense population, is far removed from the comparison we have just made. Among the three hundred and forty million inhabitants of this vast empire, the greater number either have never heard of our religion, or have only a vague, incomplete idea of it: they live and die without ever having met a priest. Africa, leaving aside the northern provinces, numbers only five or six mission stations, along coasts extending more than two thousand leagues.[17] On each page of the annals of Propaganda, we

[16] Cornelius a Lapide: Commentary on Matthew, vol.15, p.564.

[17] Abbe Soulie: La Fin du Monde, V, Palme, 1872.

find this sorrowful strain, welling up from the hearts of apostles: "Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that he send labourers into his harvest."[18]

Now, it is written that, at the end of the times, the Gospel will have been given as a testimony to all the nations.

David cries out: "All the ends of the earth shall remember, and shall be converted to the Lord... For the kingdom is the Lord's: and he shall have dominion over the nations."[19]

Further on, David continues: "And he shall rule from sea to sea: from the river unto the ends of the earth. Before him the Ethiopians shall fall down...the Kings of the Arabians and of Saba shall bring gifts."[20]

The Lord then speaks through Isaias to the Church: "Enlarge the place of thy tent and stretch out the skins of thy tabernacles. Spare not: lengthen thy cords and strengthen thy stakes. For thou shalt pass on to the right hand and to the left: and thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles and shall inherit the desolate cities."[21]

These texts are explicit and precise. It is clear from their testimony that there will come a time when all heresies and schisms will be overcome, and the true religion known and practised by everyone, in all places illuminated by the sun.

This unity will assuredly not be achieved easily; mankind will not reach this golden age along paths strewn with roses: the foundations of the Church were built up with the blood of martyrs, mingled with the sweat of the apostles.

So, we must expect strife and bitter resistance. Blood will be shed; the spirit of darkness will once more throw up its seductions and wiles in abundance; we may count on there being more terrible persecutions of the Church than those which she has sustained hitherto. On the other hand, we must learn to scrutinize the thoughts of God, and to read from the decrees of His power. All the admirable inventions of modern times have their divinely-appointed end. Would God in our days have given man a glimpse of the secrets and hidden treasures of creation, would He have put into his hands all those marvellous instruments such as steam, magnetism, electricity, for the sole purpose of providing a new spur to his pride, of being the docile slaves of his selfishness and greed? Such was not the thought which He expressed by the voice of the prophet, when He said: "I will give wings to my word, harness fire to my chariots, seize my apostles as if in a whirlwind and transport them in the twinkling of an eye amidst the barbarian nations."

Thus, the time is near when Christ will gain complete triumph, when in very truth, he can be called Lord of the earth: "Deus omnis terrae vocabitur."[22]

[18] Luke 10:2.

[19] Psalm 21:29.

[20] Psalm 71:8-10.

[21] Isaias 54:2,3,4.

[22] Isaias 34:5.

At present many signs point to a great victory for Christianity. Do not our enemies have a presentiment of it? Does not a secret instinct warn them that the days of their power are numbered, and that the time when it is given to them to prevail cannot be of long duration? That is why, in their impatience to throw off the mask from every hypocrisy in the evil war they are waging against the Church they resort to all kinds of malevolent depravity, and every hostile art of shady, atheistic politics. The revolution boldly raises its standard against religion, property and the family; saps the foundations of the social structure; and mounts its attacks against us simultaneously, and on every front. The press, freed from every restraint, disseminates the most subversive doctrines and the deadliest poisons in a thousand organs. The venerable throne of the Holy See, attacked with satanic audacity, depicted as a centre of ignorance and obscurantism, as a blot on the splendours of our civilization, has finally succumbed before this mass of concerted efforts; it has collapsed utterly, so that, humanly speaking, it is impossible to entertain any hope of its being able soon to rise again.

We can understand that, in such a situation, the mighty should feel irresolute in their counsels, and their courage and constancy seem to falter. We can understand that, beyond the clouds and troubled horizons, they discern sombre prospects, and predict a renewed outbreak of crime, wars and frightful upheavals. Yet it is precisely the incredible audacity, and the continually renascent fury of our enemies, which gives us hope of a glorious new era for the Church. Christianity, in our days, is being attacked everywhere: in the arts and sciences, in Church and State, in Europe as well as Asia, in the old and new world: a sure sign that it will triumph everywhere. When will this be? God knows, but the fact is certain. The blood of martyrs becomes the seed of Christians. The Church has immutable promises. As she comes out of the Red Sea, she enters the Promised Land. The hour of darkness gives way to that of light and triumph. Following the outrages of Golgotha, she hears resounding around her the blessings and hosannas of the deliverance.

So let us not lose heart. Let us rejoice at what the future holds; and if, at the present time, our country is a prey to convulsions and torn by discord; if her fortune and political influence have become a prize, fought over by unsatisfied ambitions and vulgar nonentities, like the Prodigal Son of the Gospel, it will not be long before the memory of the peace and honour of the centuries of her youth return to her mind; she will cast off her chains and the mask of her ignominy; and, once again, there will be brilliant pages to be written, in the book which bears the title, Gesta Dei per Francos.

Yet, even if the end of the world were to be deferred for many centuries, what are centuries compared to the years of eternity? A second, an instant, more fleeting than lightning. When the Son of God was raised up to Heaven, seated upon a cloud, the Apostles could not take their eyes from the place in the sky where He had vanished. Suddenly, two angels in white garments appeared to them, and said: "Ye men of Galilee, why stand you looking up to heaven? This Jesus who is taken up from you into heaven shall so come as you have seen him going into heaven."[23]

[23] Viri Galilei, quid statis aspicientes in coelum? Hic Jesus qui assumptus est a vobis in coelum, sic veniet, quemadmodum vidistis eum euntem in coelis. (Acts 1:10,11)

Elsewhere, Christ says: "A little while, and now you shall not see me; and again a little while, and you shall see me; because I go to the Father."[24]

Nevertheless, although Christ intended to leave us in ignorance concerning the exact time of the end of the world, He deemed it fitting to give us detailed information on the manner and circumstances of this great event.

The end of the world, He says, will happen instantaneously and unexpectedly: "Veniet dies Domini sicut fur."[25]

It will come at a time when the human race, sunk in the uttermost depths of indifference, will be far from thinking about punishment and justice. Divine mercy will have exhausted all its resources and means of action. Antichrist will have appeared. Men over the whole surface of the earth will have been called to the knowledge of the truth. The Catholic Church will have blossomed out into the fullness of her life and fecundity for the last time.

Nevertheless, all these superabundant favours and prodigies will, once more, vanish from the hearts and memory of man. By a criminal abuse of graces, mankind will have returned to its vomit. Concentrating their affections and all their aspirations on the goods and gross pleasures of this world, they will, as the Sacred Books tell us, have so far turned their backs on God as to be unable to look up to Heaven, and remember its just judgements.[26] All faith will be extinguished in hearts. All flesh will have corrupted its ways. Divine Providence will judge that it is beyond remedy.

As Christ says, it will be as in the days of Noe.[27] At that time, men lived without a care, made plantations, built luxurious houses, poked fun at the old fellow Noe, as he set himself up as a carpenter, and worked day and night, building his ark. "Madman! Dreamer!" they would say. This went on until the day when the Flood came and engulfed the whole earth: "The flood came and destroyed them all." (Luke 17:27)

Thus, the final catastrophe will take place when the world is at its most secure: civilization will be at its zenith, markets will be overflowing with money and government stocks will never have been higher. There will be national celebrations, great exhibitions, and mankind, wallowing in an unprecedented material prosperity, will have ceased to hope for heaven. Crudely attached to the basest pleasures of life, men, like the miser in the Gospel, will say: My soul, you will possess your goods for many a long year. Eat, drink and be merry...

Suddenly, in the middle of the night, "in media nocte" - for it will be amidst the darkness, and at that fateful midnight hour, when the Lord once appeared in His lowliness, that He will appear again - men, startled out

[24] Modicum et jam non videbitis me: et iterum modicum, et videbitis me: quia vado ad Patrem. (John 16:16)

[25] 2 Peter 3:10.

[26] Daniel 13:9.

[27] Matthew 24:37,38.

of their sleep, will hear a great clamour and noise, and a voice will be heard saying: "Behold, the bridegroom cometh. Go ye forth to meet him." Ecce, sponsus venit, exite obviam ei.[28]

In the annals of Savoy the memory and tradition is preserved of an appalling catastrophe, which presents us the image and outline of what will happen when God abandons the human race, and His patience is finally exhausted.

It was seven hundred years ago, on 24th November, 1248, the eve of the day when the Church celebrates the feast of St. Catherine.

That evening, the season was mild, the air calm and the stars twinkled in the sky. The whole valley where the present town of Chambery is situated lay quiet and secure.

An evil, irreligious man then ruled tyrannically over a town, now gone for ever, but which at that time stood next to the city of my story.[29]

This man had gathered together a large number of merry companions. He was celebrating, with banquets and drunken revelry, the sacrilegious plunder of a monastery which he had turned to profane use, after mercilessly expelling the monks and holy inmates who were the legitimate owners. Probably, as in Balthazar's time, it was a sumptuous meal, and the wine and liqueurs, mingled with blasphemies and sardonic laughter, flowed in abundance. Suddenly, in an instant, in the middle of the night, the earth was shaken by a tremendous shock. Sky and ground seemed to be shaken by horrible whirlwinds, voices and howling of storms, which you would have thought came from the caverns of hell; and, before the guests could rise to their feet, before they could utter a cry for help, they

[28] Matthew 25:6.

[29] This town, thriving in the 13th Century, was the town of Saint-Andre, 4½ miles from Chambery. It was the centre of the ecclesiastical deanery of Savoy, possessing a priory and a chapter, the dean of which had jurisdiction over the surrounding parishes. In the county of Savoy, it happened that a counsellor or advocate of the count, named Jacques Bonivard, managed, through lies and intrigue, to have the priory of Saint-Andre assigned to him in commendam, by the count of Savoy and Pope Innocent IV. To mark his assumption of possession, he invited his friends to a great feast when, in the middle of the night, a rock, of some four furlongs in size, suddenly broke loose from a high mountain, called Mont Gramier, and crushed beneath its ruins Bonivard with his friends, the priory and fifteen or sixteen neighbouring villages or hamlets, over the space of a full league. The monks of the priory, whom Bonivard had driven out by force, were the sole survivors, having taken refuge in the chapel of Notre-Dame de Myans, now the national shrine of Savoy, which owes its fame to its miraculous preservation, at the time of the complete destruction of Saint-Andre, and the hamlets of the deanery. This annihilation of five parishes was so stupendous, and wrought such havoc on the land, that no trace of them remained, except for a few mounds here and there, and some small lakes of running water, so deep that, for several centuries, they could not be sounded. (For further details, see the fine book by Fr. Trepier, Histoire du Decanat de Savoie.)

were buried alive beneath the collapsing mass of a gigantic mountain: one town, five hamlets, a whole region of six thousand inhabitants, were engulfed in chasms, the traces of which are written in indelible characters on the fragments of our souls, and remain as an ineffaceable and living memory of mingled legend and horror in the minds of our people.

This image, borrowed from one of the most memorable and dreadful events that have occurred in our history is, in one sense, more vivid and striking than that of Noe and the Flood: for, at least, at the time of Noe and the Flood, men had time to collect their thoughts, and obtain the grace of repentance before they perished, and the disaster struck only gradually; if all did not succeed in saving themselves for the present life, St. Peter tells us explicitly that the greater number returned to God, and saved themselves for the life to come.* In his first Epistle, chapter 3, verses 19 and 20, he says that, when the holy soul of Jesus Christ had been separated from His body, He "preached to those spirits that were in prison, which had been for some time incredulous, when they waited for the patience of God in the days of Noe."

On the day of judgement, however, it will be as at the abyss of Myan and the foot of the hill of Saint-Andre: it will all happen with unparaleled promptness and violence - "Coeli magno impetu transient."

Christ tells us: "...he that is on the house-top, let him not come down to take anything out of his house; and he that is in the field, let him not go back to take his coat. And woe to them that are with child and that give suck in those days... Then, if any man shall say to you: Lo, here is Christ, or there; do not believe him... For as lightning cometh out of the east and appeareth even into the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be."[30]

By what means will this great destruction take place? What will be the efficient cause, the principal agent, the direct, immediate instrument? Holy Scripture did not intend to omit any of the circumstances concerning this event, the gravest and most decisive of all that have succeeded one another since the creation. It teaches that

* Note by the publishers of the English edition. It is true that St. Jerome and other Catholic interpreters have held the view that some of those who had initially mocked Noe when he was building the ark repented when the flood which he had foretold arrived and were saved after a period of expiation in Purgatory. That these were "the greater number", however, is a view peculiar to Fr. Arminjon and may have arisen from a lapse of memory or a misreading of the text in question. Certainly the fact that Our Lord preached to the souls who had been incredulous in the time of Noe and later repented in no way says or implies that the majority were in this category.

In fact it is also permissible to interpret the passage in question as referring to those who died during the century between the commencement of the construction of the ark and the coming of the flood, including, perhaps, Noe's father Lamech and grandfather Mathusala. If this interpretation were correct it would not necessarily be true that any had been saved outside the ark during the flood which would accord more closely with the parallel between the ark and the Church as the sole means of salvation.

[30] Matthew 24:17,18,27.

the world will not perish by inundation as at the Flood, will not collapse by virtue of an earthquake and will not be buried under ashes and lava as were Herculaneum and Pompeii in the reign of Titus, but will be set ablaze and destroyed by fire.[31] Such was already the ancient belief, common among the Egyptians and the Persian philosophers. Cicero said that the world would end by fire.[32]

The remarkable thing is that present-day science concurs with the Sacred Books, in showing that fire will be the great architect of God's justice, and of the renovation which will follow when this has been manifested.[33]

Thus, science, like the Bible, has revealed that fire was the first created force to have developed its energy and displayed its activity. It was by fire that nature was made fruitful, and the elements set to work; thence came, also, the great transformations of the primitive world, the erection of mountains, the making of the stars and, finally, the emergence of the universe, with all the order and variety which it presents to our admiring gaze.

Genesis 1:2 says: "The earth was void and empty, and darkness was upon the face of the deep." In other words, as the experts and commentators explain, matter was volatilized, and in the state of vapour. Before the Creator had bestowed its properties and diverse forms, by dividing

[31] Although apocryphal, the book of Enoch seems to contain the principal beliefs prevailing in Judaea in the time of Christ. It is said that, when men shall have filled up the measure of their iniquities towards God and Israel, then shall come the great cataclysm, of which the Flood was only the prelude and, as it were, the warning. This time, divine justice will go the whole way; evil will be conquered for ever; the earth will be purified by fire, not by water. Beneath new heavens and upon a new earth, will begin the reign without end of the elect, a reign of justice, truth and peace, the true reign of God, wherein Israel will be the royal people.

[32] A common funeral-pyre awaits the world, says Lucan, in which the bones of men will be mingled with the remains of the stars. "Communis mundo superest rogus, ossibus astra mixturus." (<u>Pharsalia</u>, XXIII)

Ovid portrays Jupiter on the point of casting his thunderbolts upon the earth, and stopping suddenly for, he says: The decrees of fate come to his mind, and he recalls that, one day, the sea, the land and the very palace of heaven will burst into flame and burn up, and the framework of the world, made with such skill, will be put out of joint.

> "Ecce quoque in fatis reminiscitur adfore tempus
> Quo mare, quo tellus, corruptaque regia coeli
> Ardeat, et mundi moles operosa laboret." (<u>Metamorphoses</u>, I, 350)

(On this tradition and these various quotations, see the work of Fr. de Bouniol - <u>Etudes religieuses</u>, Nov. 1879)

[33] This combustion of the world is a fact already begun, and observed by astronomers. Fr. Secchi speaks of a star which, in twelve days, grew from the second to the sixth magnitude. Its spectrum was studied. It was found from its dazzling spectrum-lines, that it passed through all the phases of incandescence, and was enveloped in a vast fire. The same observation has been made on other stars, which have extinguished in a few days and completely disappeared.

and co-ordinating it in the six days' labour, all these constituents were jumbled, disunited and in a chaotic state. Earth, sun and stars presented a picture of a vast, liquescent or gaseous sea, scattered around the immensity of space. This sea was motionless and inert. It bubbled on its surface and in its innermost depths, and was set in motion under the quickening breath of an eternal, all-powerful agent, which was none other than the Spirit of God: Et spiritus Dei ferebatur super aquas.[34] The Holy Spirit subjected the material substance to a sort of incubation. Under the action and by the effects of this sovereign heat of immeasurable intensity, the elements underwent a casting and recasting, perfected themselves, acquired their power and energy, shed their dross, like gold, which is refined and separated from its rust, in the crucible where it is cast. When, thus transformed by the blast of this furnace of the Holy Spirit, they were rendered capable of hearing the word of God, the Creator called them in turn and said:

"Be light made. And light was made;" and, after He had made night and day and laid out the sky, He separated the solid matter from the vaporous mass surrounding it, and said: "Let the dry land appear" and the land was consolidated. He spoke also to the waters, leaving, on our globe, out of the liquid part, only what was necessary to irrigate it and fill the basins of the seas, and sent away the remainder, in the state of vapour or ether, to fill the vast expanses above all the spheres and skies:[35] Divisitque aquas quae erant sub firmamento, ab his quae erant super firmamentum.[36]

It was a grand, sublime scene, which would give rise to long and magnificent developments. Who would not feel his spirits rise, and his heart quiver, at the sight of the creative act, that masterpiece of divine wisdom and power, throwing up streams of light and beauty from the shapeless, shadowy ocean, implanting movement and action in all the inert beings, which the divine Spirit had invested with His character, penetrating them with His fire and radiance?

[34] Genesis 1:2.

[35] From indisputable investigations and observations, and by resolving the light of the stars, the most learned astronomers of our century, Janssen, Secchi and Angstroem, have established the existence of higher waters in the area of the firmament, that is, around the sun, in the planets and even in the most distant stars. On 12th May, 1869, Janssen wrote from Himalaya to the Academy of Science in Paris: "Certain hypotheses led me to investigate whether the spectral light of certain stars did not present the optical characteristics of water vapour. Experiment has confirmed my predictions. Today we can no longer doubt that a large number of stars are enveloped in an aqueous atmosphere. The sun itself shows spots and furrows, caused by water vapour." These are the higher waters spoken of in the Bible. Thus, true science has confounded the hostile, unbelieving science which scoffed at Moses, and falsely inveighed against our sacred books.

[36] Genesis 1:17.

Et spiritus oris ejus omnis virtus eorum.[37] Today, however, we cannot speak of these admirable works except in passing, and insofar as they bear upon our chosen subject.

Now, this same Spirit of God, who has strewn treasures of harmony and perfection throughout the universe, will proceed in the same way, when it comes to ordaining new heavens, and building that palace which shall serve eternally, as a dwelling-place for glorified men.

Here, we are not indulging our imagination, and our voice is not our own, but that of all the prophets who have spoken, and of all the evangelists who have written: "A fire shall go before him, and shall burn his enemies round about... The mountains melted like wax, at the presence of the Lord."[38] Under the effect of its brilliance, the sun will darken and the moon will no longer give its light, and the stars will fall. That is, having been dissolved for the second time, they will vanish like droplets in the air.[39]

That fire will be the one which will devour the wicked like straw, penetrate their bones to the marrow and consume them forever.

[37] Psalm 33:6.

[38] Psalm 96:3,4.

[39] In accordance with the Gospel texts which tell us plainly that the powers of Heaven will be moved - Virtutes Dei commovebuntur - and that the stars in the sky will fall, it must be acknowledged that it will not be only our earth, but the stars or, at the very least, the whole of our planetary system, which will be dissolved, thrown into disorder and set ablaze. In his treatise on the celestial mechanism, and in his theory on the variation of the planets and the displacement of their orbital axis, the astronomer Lagrange draws the conclusion that our planetary system is safe from all collapse, and that it is so constituted as to be capable of lasting thousands of millions of centuries. Lagrange's theory is no doubt very fine and ingenious, but is founded on the hypothesis that no extraneous and unforeseen cause will intervene to change the present order, and belie the exact calculations of science. Now, He who has created the heavens and directed their movements with such perfect and admirable harmony and order can, in an instant, and without any miracle, undo His work. By a secret cause, unknown to man, He can produce a confusion or change in the celestial movements which will, instantaneously and utterly, overturn them and, in the planets and the motion of their satellites, neutralize and suspend the forces and laws of attraction, which our experts consider invariable and eternal. We know that these things will take place, as the eternal Truth has formally foretold that the ruin and disruption of the heavens will come at the end of the times; and this ruin is certain, as it is written: "Coeli et terra transibunt, verba autem mea non praeteribunt." As the Italians say: "Scillaba di Dio non si cancella." Thus the end of the world will be a supernatural fact because, as to the time, it belongs to the exclusive competence of God's will, and, as to the manner, it will be a fact of the natural order, because God will use secondary and natural causes to bring it about.

It will be the final trial for the just who will be living in the last days. For them, it will take the place of Purgatory, the cleansing flames of which, at the moment of the resurrection, will be extinguished, never to be lit up again. It will be the crucible wherein they will cast off the remains of their earthly rust, so that no stain may darken the whiteness of their garments, when they appear before the throne of God.

We may be quite certain that all these events will be accomplished. They are certain, with absolute certitude, as God is Himself, as is His spirit of truth, which is not subject to any error or change.

As a matter of fact, we can state that every one of us here will have left this lower world, before being witnesses of this great scene of desolation and ruin. Nonetheless, Jesus Christ has judged it fitting that we should be instructed concerning it, because these great truths are not of a speculative order, but are intended to bring about practical and immediate effects in the conduct of our lives.

In truth, if the earth and all it contains must one day disappear by fire, the goods of this world are no more to be esteemed than wood and straw. What point is there, then, in making them the object of our desires and cares? Why seek to build and leave marks of our genius and power where we have no permanent abode, and where the form of this world will be removed, like a tent which has no travellers to shelter?

It may be said that it will be a thousand years before this frightening cataclysm takes place; but Christ has said that a thousand years are but an instant compared with eternity, and when the moment comes - when, from the land of the future life, we are the witnesses and actors in that supreme drama - the whole span of humanity will seem so short to us, that we shall scarcely consider it to have lasted a single day.[40]

The great prophet, St. Paul, for whom time had no bounds and space no size, believed that he had already been transported there. In his cave at Bethlehem, St. Jerome could hear the trumpet of doom awakening the dead, and his hair stood on end, out of fear, and his flesh and bones quivered with an indescribable shudder. Lastly, Christ tells us to meditate upon these great teachings, for it is certain that we shall be taken by surprise, and that the time will come sooner than we think.

"At the end of the fourteenth century, an extraordinary personage appeared from the depths of Spain. His name was Vincent Ferrer. A prophet and wonder-worker since his youth, he grew up amidst universal astonishment. The Spirit of God lay upon him, took possession of his heart and inflamed him with a zeal unknown since St. Paul. It ruled his body, which he sustained, despite his extreme weakness, amidst the most crushing labours, and the harshest austerities. The power to work miracles was granted him - in short, he uttered the most prodigiously powerful words that mankind had ever heard since St. Paul.

[40] "Mille anni, ante oculos tuos, tamquam dies hesterna quae praeteriit." (Psalm 39:4)

"A super-human being, although he was a man, he constantly refused the honours which the Pope urged him to accept. His life was one of continuous prayer, fasting and preaching. For twenty years, he travelled through Europe, and, for twenty years, Europe trembled beneath the ardour and fire of his inspired voice.

"The last judgement was the favourite subject of his preaching. He himself declared to all that he had been specially sent by the Sovereign Judge, to proclaim the approach of the last days.

"One day, at Salamanca, a city renowned for its theologians and scholars, a countless throng crowded round to hear the messenger from Heaven. Suddenly, raising his voice in the middle of the multitude, he said: 'I am the angel of the Apocalypse whom St. John saw flying through the midst of heaven, crying aloud: Ye nations, fear the Lord and render Him glory, for the day of judgement is near.'

"At these strange words, an indescribable murmur broke out amidst the assembly. There were shouts of 'Madness!' 'Bragging!' 'Impiety!'

"The messenger of God paused, gazing at the sky in a kind of rapture or ecstasy; then, he continued and, raising his voice, cried out again: 'I am the angel of the Apocalypse, the angel of the judgement.' The agitation and murmuring reached its height. 'Calm yourselves,' said the saint, 'do not take scandal at my words. You will see with your own eyes that I am what I say. Go to the gate of St. Paul, at the end of the city, and you will find a dead woman. Bring her to me, and I shall raise her to life, as proof of what St. John said of me.

"Once more, shouts and an even greater protest greeted this proposal. Nevertheless, a few men decided to go to the gate indicated. There, they did indeed find a dead woman, took her up and laid her amidst the assembly.

"The apostle, who did not for a moment leave the elevated spot from which he was preaching, said: 'Woman, in the name of God, I command you to rise.' The dead woman immediately rose, wrapped in her shroud, cast off the winding-sheet that covered her face, and showed herself full of life, in the middle of the assembly. Vincent then added: 'For the honour of God and the salvation of all these people, say, now that you can speak, whether I am really the angel of the Apocalypse, entrusted with proclaiming to all the approach of the last judgement.' 'You are that angel,' replied the woman, 'truly you are.'

"In order to place this marvellous testimony between two miracles, the saint spoke to her again: 'Do you prefer to remain alive, or do you wish to die once more?' 'I should willingly live.' said the woman. 'Live then.' In fact, she lived many years longer, a living witness, says one historian, of an astounding prodigy, and of the highest mission ever entrusted to man."[41]

We shall not discuss the authenticity of this story. It has raised doubts among certain hagiographers, and the circumstances surrounding it have given rise to criticism and debate. In defence of our opinion, it suffices to

[41] Mgr Gaume: Ou allons-nous? no.XVII.

state that the Church has not pronounced it apocryphal, since, in the Bull of canonization of the saint, it is said: "He had the words of the eternal Gospel, to proclaim, as the angel flying through the midst of heaven, the kingdom of God, to every tongue, tribe and nation, and to show the proximity of the last judgement."

However, it is nearly five hundred years since this event happened, and the last judgement announced by the wonder-worker of the fourteenth century has not taken place. Are we to conclude that the saint was misled, and that the miracle of this resurrection, attested by serious, trustworthy witnesses, recalled and handed down in sculpture and painting, must be assigned to the realm of legend, and held to be an allegory, a mere invention?

St. Vincent Ferrer spoke in the same way as holy Doctors had done before him, and as the majority of great apostolic men have done after him. Thus, as a matter of fact, St. Jerome censured a certain Juda, the famous author of an Ecclesiastical History, for having asserted that the violence of the persecution portended the end of the world, which would occur in a short time; yet, the same St. Jerome in one of his letters,[42] brilliantly depicting the calamities and disasters which he had witnessed, himself expressed almost the same opinion. St. Cyprian (Epistle 58) wrote these words: "You must be convinced and hold for certain that the day of the final desolation has begun to dawn upon you, and that the time of Antichrist is near..."

In the panegyric of his brother Satyrus, St. Ambrose exclaims: "He was removed from life, that he might not be a witness of the end of the world, and the complete destruction of the universe." St. Gregory the Great and St. Bernard have expressed the same sentiments, in their books and discourses. These illustrious doctors and great saints spoke in this way, either because they saw faith becoming scarce and the calamities of their age increasing every day in alarming proportions, or because they were gripped by fear at the thought of that great day, and wanted to plant that salutary fear in men who had gone astray in order to bring them back to the knowledge of God and good living. Yet, we cannot say that they strayed from the truth; they spoke in accordance with Scripture, which, by emphasizing this fundamental truth, unceasingly shows the prospect of the advent of the divine Judge as imminent: Prope est jam Dominus.

In this, the Apostles and inspired writers have not deceived us, inasmuch as time is nothing to those who have crossed over the frontiers of earthly life. The whole span of the centuries, says the Holy Spirit, is no more than the fleeting day, "tamquam dies hesterna quae praeteriit". Just as, in the firmament, there are stars separated by myriads of miles which, on account of their distance, appear to merge, so as to form one single point, when observed from this earth: in the same way, from the heights of the life of God, where we shall one day be immersed, time will be such as if it did not exist. A year - a hundred thousand years - millions of years, contemplated from the bosom of eternity, will not seem to us any more than mere points. We shall consider these

[42] St. Jerome: 2nd letter to Ageruchia de Monogamia.

lengths of time as so microscopic, so fractional, that, in a sense, there will not be any difference between them which our mind can discern.

Consequently, these words of St. John the Evangelist may with perfect truthfulness be applied to the general resurrection, as well as to the partial resurrections performed by Jesus Christ: "Amen, amen, I say unto you that the hour cometh, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: Venit hora, et nunc est quando mortui audient vocem Filii Dei, et qui audierint vivent."[43]

Moreover, our eternal destiny will be settled irrevocably at death, and the particular judgement which must follow will soon determine the circumstances in which we shall appear at the tribunal of divine justice, and the place which will there be assigned to us.

Compared with this inevitable ending of human destinies, our political controversies are nothing but idle noise. Revolutions, which cause the disappearance of peoples and bring down republics and empires, are less than a change of scene or decoration in the theatre. All those colossal enterprises and marvellous works to which men devote their minds, and which they bring to perfection at the cost of the greatest sacrifices and the most hazardous efforts, appear like a mere wisp of smoke, and are more fragile works than the web spun by a spider, and most often last less than a day.

There will then be no other distinction between men than that of merit and virtue. All vain and ambitious thoughts will have vanished. Politics will have ceased. Science itself will be destroyed: scientia destruetur.[44]

Happy those who have heard the divine word, and kept it faithfully in their hearts. Happy those who, awakening from their sleep, shall have walked honestly and openly, following the Apostle's recommendation. Happy those who, like the wise virgins, shall have carefully conserved the oil of their lamp, and formed their sheaf for the day of the dazzling, solemn harvest.

These shall be called the predestinate, because, as St. John says, their names are written in the book of life of the Lamb which was slain from the beginning of the world. May that destiny be ours. Amen.

[43] John 5:27
[44] Romans 3:8

SECOND CONFERENCE

The Persecution of Antichrist and the Conversion of the Jews

> Et tunc revelabitur ille iniquus, quem Dominus Jesus interficiet spiritu oris sui, et destruet illustratione adventus sui.
>
> And then that wicked one shall be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus shall kill with the spirit of his mouth and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming. (2 Thessalonians 2:8)

The world will have an end. This is a truth which we have established, and which faith and reason alike prove.

The end of the world, and the subsequent final coming of the Son of God, will happen unexpectedly, with the rapidity of lightning, rending the clouds as it darts from east to west.

However, precisely when that day will come is a secret, hidden in the depths of the divine intelligence. We know neither the day nor the hour, and Jesus Christ, the ambassador of the Divinity on earth, tells us that He has been explicitly commanded not to disclose them to us.

Accordingly, all the opinions which learned and pious personages at different periods have permitted themselves to express on this question, are no more than personal, private sentiments, assertions resting on mere conjecture, the error and futility of which has been demonstrated more than once by events.

St. Cyprian and Tertullian, considering the fury of the persecutors and the violence of the war of extermination waged to the utmost against the Christians, designated these calamities and all these horrors as signs of the proximity of the last judgement.

"The end of the world is not far off," said St. John Chrysostom; "the earthquakes and the chilling of charity are, as it were, the forerunners and omens of that terrible event."

We all know that, at the time of the fall of the Roman Empire and the social dislocation which accompanied that great cataclysm and, subsequently, at the beginning of the year 1,000 of the Christian era, people believed they were close to the period foretold, and thought they were seeing the prelude of the final destruction in the public disasters and collapse of institutions.

Earlier, in the time of St. Paul, the same terror had gripped people's minds. Visionaries and leaders of factions interpreted the words of St. Matthew's Gospel in a grossly literal sense. Convinced that the destruction of the world would follow closely upon the destruction of Jerusalem, they indulged in a rash of extravagant predictions, filling people's imagination with horror. They drew men away from the fulfilment of their civil and religious duties, invited them not to marry, not to build, but to abandon themselves to a mind-softening inertia, while awaiting the catastrophe which was to strike them.

St. Paul felt obliged to disabuse these beguiled and erring souls, and said to them:

"And we beseech you, brethren,...that you may not be easily moved...as if the day of the Lord were at hand... for unless there come a revolt first, and the man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition, who opposeth and is lifted up above all that is called God or that is worshipped, so that he sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself as if he were God."[45]

Here, then, is a definite fact, given by the Holy Ghost, and announced by St. Paul, in order to dispel the fears to which some were abandoning themselves, and to help faithful Christians guard against false systems and uncertain, hazardous predictions.

What is clear and undeniable from the passage we have just quoted is that, before the end of the world, there will appear on earth a profoundly evil man, invested with a quasi-superhuman power, who, challenging Christ, will wage an impious and foolish war against Him. Through the fear which this man will inspire, and, particularly, by his strategems and seductive genius, he will succeed in conquering almost the entire universe, he will have altars erected to himself and will compel all peoples to adore him.

Will this strange man, unique in his evil, be one of our race? Will his face have the features of man, and will the same blood as ours flow in the veins of this ringleader of error and corruption? Or, as some have understood, will he be an incarnation of Satan, a demon thrown up from Hell, and disguised in human form? Or again, as other doctors have maintained, is this wicked creature just a myth, an allegorical personage, in whom Holy Scripture and the Fathers intended to portray, in a single image, the totality of tyrants and persecutors - to set out prominently the collective image of all the wicked and all the heresiarchs who have fought against Christ and His Church, since the beginning of time?

These various interpretations cannot be reconciled with the definite, precise text of the Sacred Books. Almost all the Doctors and Fathers, St. Augustine, St. Jerome and St. Thomas, clearly maintain that this terrifying malefactor, this monster of impiety and depravity, will be a human person. The learned Bellarmine shows that it is impossible to give any other meaning to the words of St. Paul and those of Daniel 11:36,37.[46] St. Paul designates this great adversary by a noun, calling him a

[45] 2 Thessalonians 2:3,4,5,6.

[46] Bellarmine: De Pontifice, book III.

man, "<u>the man of sin, the son of perdition</u>".[47]

Daniel informs us that he will attack all that is holy and worthy of respect, exalt himself boldly against the God of gods and consider as nothing the God of his Fathers: "Is Deum patrum suorum non reputabit." The Apostle adds that Christ will kill him. All these various aspects and characteristics evidently cannot be applied to an ideal, abstract being; they can only fit an individual of flesh and blood, a real, definite personage.

The Fathers and Doctors endeavoured to ascertain the origin of Antichrist, and to discover from what parents and race he will come. They unanimously express the opinion that he will be born of Jewish parents, and some declare that he will be of the tribe of Dan. Such is the interpretation they give of the passage of Genesis, "Let Dan be a snake in the way, a serpent in the path;"[48] and of this other one from Jeremias 8: "The snorting of his horses was heard from Dan."[49] They also surmise that St. John, in his Apocalypse, forbore to mention the tribe of Dan through hatred of Antichrist. But all these suppositions are uncertain. What seems beyond doubt is that Antichrist will be of Jewish birth. St. Ambrose, in his commentaries on the Epistle to the Thessalonians, says that he will be circumcised. Sulpicius Severus, in book II of his <u>Dialogues</u> says that he will compel all his subjects to submit to circumcision.

Moreover, all concur in saying that at the beginning of his reign he will succeed, by means of his trickery and fame, in making the Jews believe that he is the Messias whom they have unceasingly awaited, and that they, in their blindness, will hasten to receive him and honour him as such. That is how Suarez and most of the commentators interpret this saying of Our Lord Jesus Christ, in St. John, 5:43: "I am come in the name of my Father, and you receive me not; if another shall come in his own name, him you will receive."[50]

The same meaning must be given to these other words of St. Paul to the Thessalonians: "Because they receive not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. Therefore God shall send them the operation of error, to believe lying."[51] Now, is it likely that the Jews would acclaim, as Messias, a man who did not belong to their race, and had not been circumcised? Antichrist, then, will be a Jew. Will he be born of an illegitimate union? The theologian Suarez tells us that it is uncertain. Nevertheless, it may be presumed that a man so utterly evil, so opposed to Christ in his life and morals, will have an infamous origin; and, just as Jesus Christ had the

[47] In Greek, the article invariably designates a specific individual. It is not used to denote generic and abstract beings. Now, the Apostle, in speaking of Antichrist, uses these expressions: ὁ ἄγθρωπος τῆς ἁμαρτίας, ὁ υἱός τῆς ἀπωλείας.

[48] Fiat Dan coluber in via, cerustes in semita. (Genesis 49:17)

[49] Ex Dan audivimus fremitum equorum. (Jeremias 8:16)

[50] Si alius venerit in nomine suo, illum recipietis.

[51] Eo quod charitatem veritatis non receperunt ut salvi fierent. Ideo mittet illis Deus operationem erroris ut credant

Immaculate Virgin as His mother, so we may conclude, by analogy and induction, that His avowed adversary will be born of an impure union, and will be the offspring of an unchaste woman.[52]. "He will be a child of fornication," says St. John Damascene, "and his birth will be saturated with the breath and spirit of Satan."

What may be safely asserted of this man of iniquity is that, right from his tenderest years, he will be completely possessed by the spirit and genius of the devil. The lion of the abyss which, in the last ages of mankind, God, in His inscrutable justice, will unleash in order to punish the infidelity of men, will unite himself with him in a certain way, infusing him with the fullness of his evil. No doubt he will not be deprived of the assistance of his guardian angel, nor of the necessary help of sufficient grace, which God bestows in this life upon every single man;[53] but his hatred of God will be so violent, his aversion for every good work so invincible, and his association and commerce with the spirit of darkness so close and continual that, from his cradle to his last breath, he will remain immutably hostile to all divine invitations, and grace from above will never penetrate his heart.

St. Thomas tells us that, in his person and works, he will reveal himself as the reverse of the Son of God, and will parody His miracles and works.

Since his origin, the evil spirit has ever pursued one single goal - to usurp the place of the Omnipotent God, to form a kingdom for himself here below, in compensation for the kingdom of Heaven from which he is excluded by his rebellion; and, says Tertullian, the more surely to attain this goal, he is in the habit of making himself the <u>ape of God</u>, counterfeiting all His works.

The adversary of the last times, then, will not only set himself up as the avowed, personal enemy of Jesus Christ: he will aim openly to dethrone Him, to replace Him in the homage and veneration of men and have directed to himself the worship and glory which are due to the Creator alone. He will declare, says St. Thomas, that he is the Supreme, Eternal Being, and, by virtue of this, he will ordain that honours and a cult of latria shall be accorded him. Thus, he will have priests, he will have sacrifices offered to him, he will demand that his name should be invoked in oaths, and that men should use it to guarantee the security of treaties: Ita ut ostendens se tanquam sit Deus. In order to lend greater credence to this belief, he will counter divine revelation with false revelations; in opposition to the ceremonies of divine worship, he will set up his own impious rites; and, against the eternal Church founded by Christ, he will constitute an abominable society, of which he will be the leader and pontiff. St. Thomas adds that, just as the fullness of the Divinity dwells corporally in the Incarnate Word, so the fullness

[52] Ex fornicatione parietur atque omnem satanae afflatum suscipiet. (St. John Damascene; book 50, chapter 27)

[53] Neque existimandum est Deum denegaturum illi gratiam suam sufficientem et necessariam. Est autem verisimile tantam fore antichristi malitiam, ac tam frequenter usum operandi et cogitandi mala, tantamque cum doemone familiaritem et conjunctionem, ut vix unquam det locum alicui bonae inspirationi, aut effectu spirituali angelorum custodiae, aut divinae gratiae. (Suarez: XIX, p.1034, edited by Vives)

of all evil will dwell in this terrible man, whose mission and works will be but an imitation in reverse, and an execrable counterfeit, of the mission and works of Christ.

Through him Satan will put the seal on his wickedness. He will make this living figure the quintessence, as it were, of all the sinister schemes which he has formed against mankind, and will not cease to arouse in him the burning, implacable hatred of God which moves him; and the Lord of Heaven, in His hidden counsels, will allow this firebrand from Hell to prevail for a time.

St. Thomas applies to this delegate of Satan[54] the description "caput omnium malorum": the prince and instigator of all the covetousness of the flesh and all the aberrations of the mind - so much so that the masters of lies and architects of evil who have followed one another in the course of the ages will seem, by comparison with this man, mere pygmies beside a giant. Thus, he will repeat the infamous deeds of Nero; he will be filled with the hatred and violence of Diocletian; he will have the cunning and duplicity of Julian the Apostate; he will resort to intimidation and will bend the earth beneath his sceptre like Mohammed; he will be a learned man, a philosopher, a skilful orator, outstanding in the arts and in the manufacturing sciences, he will handle mockery and ridicule like Voltaire. Lastly, he will work wonders, and rise into the air like Simon Magus.[55]

If you ask why Divine Providence will allow him to exercise such power and seduction, St. Paul the Apostle gives us the reason: "Because they receive not the love of the truth, whereby they might be saved. Therefore, God shall send them the operation of error, to believe lying; that all may be judged who have not believed the truth but have consented to iniquity."[56] Suarez says that God will permit the coming of Antichrist, particularly in order to punish the incredulity of the Jews. The latter, not having wished to worship the true Messias, nor to be convinced by His doctrine and miracles, God will permit them, for their punishment, to attach themselves to a false Messias, accord credence to his impious deeds and doctrine, and follow him in his dissolute life.[57]

At that time the peril for souls will be great, and the scandal of the contagion universal. Nevertheless, in order that those who are taken by surprise may not attribute their misfortune to anyone but themselves, the Holy Spirit has sought to give us an outline in advance of the principal stages of that terrible, decisive trial, the climax of all those that mankind has undergone.

[54] Est autem credibile, illum futurum athaeum nullumque praemium aut poenam in alia vita speraturum, ac propterea solum daemonem veneraturum a quo fallendi artem addiscet, divitias obtinebit et cujus ope imperium comparabit. (Suarez: Question LIX,4)

[55] St. Thomas, lib.III, 21; VIII, 6.

[56] 2 Thessalonians 2:10,11,12.

[57] Licet antichristus non mittetur a Deo, venire tamen permittetur. Hoc ergo sensu mittetur antichristus, seu veniet, ut Judaeos decipiet in poenam incredulitatis suae. (Suarez: Disputationes, LIX, art.4)

First of all, in order to make us understand the violence and ferocity of the man of sin, and the skill with which he will conduct the war he has undertaken against the saints, St. John the Apostle depicts him in Apocalypse 13 under the figure of a monstrous beast, having ten heads or diadems on his horns, and, written on each of these diadems, the name of a blasphemy. According to interpreters, these ten heads and ten diadems signify ten dependent kings, who will be his lieutenants and will act as the executors of his trickery and cruelty.

Moreover, St. John tells us that he will be invested with absolute sovereignty, and that his power will extend over all tribes and peoples, over men of every nation and language.[58]

As he succeeds in overcoming the saints by a persecution carried to the extreme limit, he will simultaneously give free rein to all kinds of licentiousness, and there will be no freedom except for evil.

Lastly, he will be a master in the occult sciences and in the art of magic, and, through the agency of demons, he will perform wonderful deeds, which deluded men will take for true miracles.[59]

The first of these miracles mentioned by St. John will be an apparent resurrection. In one of the wars where Antichrist will appear as if mounted on a chariot of light and fire, he will be mortally wounded in the head. For a time he will be seen lifeless, apparently dead. Then, suddenly, he will rise, and his wound will be instantaneously healed. At the sight of this the deluded men, the unbelievers and free-thinkers of that time who, like those of our own day, lacking any faith in the supernatural and in revealed truth, will spurn miracles as implacably condemned by science and reason - these men will give credit to the hoax. They will exclaim, with enthusiasm and admiration: "Who is like to the beast? And who shall be able to fight with him?"

Secondly, the man of sin will make fire come down from Heaven, in order to create the belief that he is the master of nature, the ruler of seasons, and that he has dominion over the sky and the stars.[60]

[58] Apocalypse 13:5,8.

[59] Apocalypse 13.

[60] It is well known that the devils, deprived of their original beauty and goodness, have not lost any of their powers. They can act on the elements, condense clouds and vapours, project lightning and unleash storms. As for miracles properly so called, God alone can perform them. A miracle is a derogation of the laws of nature which surpasses every created force, whether human or angelic. Thus, Antichrist will not work true miracles, but only false and apparent ones. It is said in the Sibylline Books, lib.III, Oraculum, that he will make the sun stand still, walk upon the sea and move mountains. These marvels will all be mere illusions, a sort of mirage, similar to those worked by devils when, through the agency of their magicians and mediums, they fascinate men, befuddle their imagination and sight, to the extent of making objects seem to them very different from what they are.

Thirdly, he will make a statue speak; demons will use a tree or a lifeless piece of wood as an instrument, with the aid of which they will utter their fabrications and false oracles. Pieces of furniture will also be seen to move and run around of themselves, mountains will change their position in an instant, and demons, transformed into angels of light, will appear in the air.

Then, by an incomprehensible judgement of God, the free-thinkers and the great sceptics of the last times will take these impostures and conjuring tricks seriously. Dupes of their own presumption and credulity, they will plunge headlong into all the follies of necromancy and divination, thus vindicating, in the face of the world, the oracle of the Sacred Books: "Now, the Spirit manifestly saith that in the last times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to spirits of error and doctrines of devils: attendentes spiritibus erroris et doctrinis doemoniorum."[61]

Lastly, it is written that the pride of the man of sin will be boundless. He will open his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, His tabernacle and the saints in Heaven. Daniel says that he will think himself entitled to abolish times and laws, et putabit quod possit mutare tempora et leges.[62] That is, he will suppress feasts and Sunday observance, alter the order of months and the length and division of weeks, and remove Christian names from the calendar, replacing them with the emblems of the lowest animals. In a word, this counterfeit of Christ will be an atheist in the full sense of the term. He will make away with the Cross and every religious symbol; as Daniel again declares, he will substitute abominable rites for the Christian sacrifice in every church. Pulpits will be silent; teaching and education will be lay, compulsory and godless. Jesus Christ will be banished from the child's cradle, from the altar where spouses are united, from the bedside of the dying. Over the whole surface of the earth, worship of any god other than this christ of Satan will not be tolerated.

In His impenetrable designs, God will allow men to undergo this supreme, terrible trial in order to teach them how great the power of the devil is, and how immense their own weakness; He desired to announce it to us so that we might prepare ourselves even now to sustain it, by having recourse to Him through prayer, and by providing ourselves with the spiritual weapons of charity and faith. In addition, Antichrist is destined to bring out, in its splendour, the fidelity and constancy of those whose names are written in the Book of Life, those whom all his violence and wiles will not succeed in daunting.

On the other hand, it is certain that the duration and bitterness of this persecution will make it the ultimate criterion for discerning the elect from the reprobate since it will also be the ruin of many whose perseverance will fail; thus it will be a test "set for the ruin and for the resurrection of many....that out of many hearts thoughts may be revealed."[63]

[61] 1 Timothy 4:1.

[62] Daniel 7:25.

[63] Luke 2:34,35.

Apostasies will be numerous, and courage will become rare. It is written that the powers of the heavens will be shaken, and the stars of the firmament will fall. In other words, the leaders of peoples will be seen to bend the knee before the reigning idol, and, what is still more lamentable, among the exponents of science, the luminaries of theology and the oracles of sacred eloquence, a large number will abandon the truth, and let themselves be carried along with the current of depravity.

Again, St. John speaks of a strange, mysterious character which all, "both little and great, rich and poor, freemen and bondmen,"[64] will be obliged to have on their right hand or on the forehead; this mark will be a sign of apostasy, attesting that all those who bear it, whether to please the master, or to escape his wrath, have renounced the true Christ, and enlisted for ever under the banner of His enemy.[65]

Those who bear this degrading mark will enjoy the advantages of fortune in abundance; they will have the high salaries, the public offices, and a multiplicity of pleasures and of all desirable possessions; but those who refuse to clothe themselves with this abominable seal will be outlawed. It is written that "no man might buy or sell, but he that hath the character, or the name of beast, or the number of his name." All those who do not have this mark will be forbidden to draw water from the public fountains, and will even be unworthy to open their eyes to the light of day, and breathe the pure air of the heavens.

The tribulation will be great "such as hath not been from the beginning of the world until now, neither shall be."[66] The just will be dishonoured and despised; they will be called fools and disturbers of the peace; they will be accused of trampling upon honour and patriotism, by refusing to acclaim the greatest man ever to have appeared in the world, the incomparable genius who has raised human civilization to the zenith of perfection and progress.

If the just were not to be sustained by a special assistance from God, there would not be a single one who

[64] Apocalypse 13:17,18.

[65] This sign is called a character, because it will be imprinted on the flesh. The Apostle informs us that the beast will compel both young and old to carry it. By "the young" are meant the children who will be born; for the son of perdition and his false prophets will abolish all baptism given in the name of the Holy Trinity. They will take pains to force all children to accept the character of the beast on the forehead, and reject the baptism instituted by Our Lord Jesus Christ. (Holzhauser: Interpretation de l'Apocalypse, bk.6, ch.13.)

[66] Matthew 24:21.

could withstand the violence of such temptation: Ita ut in errorem inducantur (si fieri potest) etiam electi.[67]

In the dreadful days of the great French Revolution, there were still some havens, places of safety open to convicts and outlaws. The countryside was friendly; there were impenetrable forests and hidden, isolated paths. However, in the period we are engaged in describing, science and human discoveries will have reached their zenith, and the surface of the earth will be dotted with telegraph wires and railways. Every mountain will have been bored. There will be no more rocks or caves, islands or deserts, where freedom can expect a refuge. The home itself will no longer be safe: for it is said that "brother shall betray his brother unto death, and the father his son."[68]

It is not usual for the Sacred Books, when they reveal the future to us, to go into such precise, minute detail. The prophets speak to us only enigmatically, and in abbreviated form. In general, they limit themselves to marking out the main lines of future events. However, so far as the final combat waged against the saints is concerned, the inspired Apostles have followed the maxim, mala proevisa minus feriunt; and they have neglected nothing which might strengthen the just during those days of trial and great calamity.

Thus they teach us that, at that time, the East will once more become the focal point of politics and human affairs, and that the impostor, possessed with the blind, maniacal passion to desecrate the holiest places (those which have been the scene of the labours and suffering of the God-Man), will establish his royalty at Jerusalem. For our consolation, they tell us that God will shorten the duration of his power, limiting it to forty-two months or three and a half years, menses quadraginta duos.

The number given in the Sacred Books probably does not express the length of time which the man of sin will need in order to conquer the earth and reach the zenith of his omnipotence. It is not reasonable to suppose that, even with the aid of the superhuman and satanic powers which will be at his disposal, he will be able to become master of the earth in a single day. It is to be supposed that he will only attain the fullness of his sovereignty gradually, and will require a longish period to subdue the nations and envelop the whole world in the murky web of his trickery and seduction. All we know from St. John and Daniel is that his dominion over men "of every race, tribe and language" will subsist "usque ad tempus, et tempora et dimidium temporis," that is, one year, two more years and half a year. Daniel, in chapter 12, tells us: "From the time when the continual sacrifice shall be taken away and the abomination unto desolation shall be set up, there shall be a thousand two hundred ninety days."[69] Hence, it follows that the point when Christ will no longer be

[67] Matthew 24:24.

[68] Mark 13:12.

[69] Et a tempore cum ablatum fuerit juge sacrificium, et posita fuerit abominatio in desolationem, dies mille ducenti nonaginta. (Daniel 12)

present on our altars, offering Himself as a victim to His Father's justice in order to make reparation for men's crimes, is to be reckoned from the day when Antichrist has obtained universal dominion: only then will the unbloody sacrifice of the altar cease to be celebrated; but, until that day, and during the time taken by Antichrist to achieve his kingship, the sacrifice of the mass will continue to subsist.

St. John indicates the name of Antichrist; but he deems it proper to tell us only in the form of numerals. We know that in various languages numbers can be translated into letters of the alphabet and, conversely, the letters of the alphabet into numbers. So, St. John tells us that, in a language which he does not make known to us, the name of the beast is expressed by the number 666.

The Fathers and Doctors have laboured to discover the key to this number, and to ascertain the name hidden beneath this mysterious number;[70] but their investigations have come to nothing. It is possible to imagine a vast number of different names the letters of which, according to the way they are put together, express the number indicated by St. John. We cannot go beyond the view of St. Irenaeus, who assures us that the Holy Ghost presented the name of Antichrist in the form of this enigmatic number, because He wanted its true meaning to remain unknown until the fulfilment of His prophecy, the day when it would be in the interest of men for Antichrist to be revealed to them. Then, says St. John, "he that hath understanding, let him count the number of the beast. Qui habet intellectum, computat numerum Bestiae."[71]

[70] In his Interpretation de l'Apocalypse, the holy and learned Holzhauser remarks that, in the Greek language, which was the one used by the St. John the Apostle, the word ἀγτεμος, meaning "converse", when rendered by a figure, corresponds to the number 666. Thus, in his view, the number 666 designates the characteristic quality of the man of sin, not his own name. It is difficult to believe that St. John would have announced the number 666 as something profound and mysterious, an impenetrable enigma, as it were, if the meaning were so simple and evident. In that case, the Apostle would merely have informed us that Antichrist would be the converse of Christ. Holzhauser adds that the beast's number, 666, is a number of months which make fifty-five and a half years. On the basis of this fact, he tells us that Antichrist was born in 1855, that he will live for fifty-five years, and that his persecution will take place around 1908. It must be said that these are altogether arbitrary conjectures and suppositions. Men no less holy and learned than Holzhauser have often indulged in the same calculations, and have constantly been mistaken. The Church has not taught us anything on the time of Antichrist's coming. There is not a single passage in Holy Scripture which supports such interpretations.

[71] Apocalypse 13:16.

St. Paul tells us that God is faithful, for He has made a pact with temptation, and does not permit man to be tested beyond his strength. Here, the temptation will exceed the normal conditions and laws of mankind. It befits the mercy of God that the remedy should be proportionate to the extent of the evil. Now the means of succour foretold is the most superhuman and extraordinary, the most alien to the rules of history and the ordinary workings of Providence, of all those that Heaven has sent man since the Incarnation.

Just when the tempest is at its most violent, when the Church is leaderless, when the unbloody sacrifice has everywhere ceased and everything seems humanly lost, two witnesses, St. John tells us, will be seen to arise.

These two witnesses will be two strange men, appearing suddenly amidst the world, without anyone being able to say of what birth or origin they are, nor from what place or family they have come.

This is how St. John speaks of them in the eleventh chapter of the Apocalypse:

"And I will give unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred sixty days, clothed in sackcloth. These are the two olive-trees and the two candlesticks that stand before the Lord of the earth." [72]

No tongue can express the sheer amazement which will grip mankind, at the sight of these two men, strangers to our passions and affairs, one of them having lived six thousand years, the other thirty centuries, in some ethereal region or other, beneath firmaments and upon spheres inaccessible to our senses and understanding. Yet, neither of these witnesses is alien to the human family. One of these candlesticks and olive-trees is Henoch, the great-great-grandfather of Noe, the direct ancestor of the whole human race. The other is the prophet Elias who, as

[72] St. John does not tell us expressly that the two witnesses whom he mentions will be Henoch and Elias, but it is clear from the context that, by the two <u>candlesticks</u> and the two olive-trees, he does not mean <u>any</u> two saints or preachers, but two definite personages, endowed with an extraordinary power and holiness. Now - pondering all the facts and circumstances foretold to us about the life and death of these personages, and recalling all that we are told about them by Scripture, especially in Ecclesiasticus 48 and by the prophet Malachias, concerning the mission they will one day be called upon to fulfil - Bede, St. Anselm, St. Augustine and a large number of the Fathers assure us that the two witnesses of whom the Apocalypse speaks are none other than Henoch and Elias, and that they were miraculously preserved from death for no other purpose than to fight against Antichrist, and bear testimony to Jesus Christ, at the end of the world.

the Saviour has said, is destined to restore all things. [73] He will come a second time to stem the tide of wickedness, more reckless and unrestrained than it was in the days of Achab. It will also be the hour of the redemption of Israel. The great prophet will convince the posterity of Abraham that the Messias has come, and will remove the veil of ignorance and darkness which has lain heavy upon their eyes for nineteen centuries.

What sort of appearance and bearing will these strangers from another age present? What venerable majesty will shine forth from their persons? What inspired language will flow from their lips? Holy Scripture does not tell us. It teaches us that they will prophesy for one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth, their garments and features bearing the marks of humility and penance. According to Daniel, the persecution of Antichrist will last for one thousand two hundred and ninety days; so the preaching of Henoch and Elias will be thirty days shorter. Hence it follows that they will appear in the period when the persecution is unleashed with the greatest violence. How, within the space of time set for their mission, will they manage to give their testimony in all inhabited places, and cover the whole extent of the earth? We answer that it will not be necessary for them to visit every town; it will be enough for them to appear in the principal ones, and for their preaching to be heard in the capitals and main centres of population where Antichrist has been present and has exercised his most powerful fascination. Furthermore, it is unlikely that Henoch and Elias will be constantly together: it is more probable that they will preach separately, until, by a command from God, or following a providential inspiration, they suddenly come together for the final battle.

[73] Cornelius a Lapide tells us that it is a certain truth, almost of faith, fidei proximum, that Henoch and Elias did not die. Tertullian, in book LVIII on the Resurrection, calls them "candidates of Eternity", in order to make us understand that they are freed from all misery and suffering, and incapable of sin. St. Irenaeus, bk.IV, ch.V, calls them coauspicantes immortalitatem, which means that they have the certain presage and omen of immortality. Neither Henoch nor Elias are yet glorified in their bodies; since they continue to be enveloped in flesh, from which, like us, they will one day be separated by death. The Fathers teach that Henoch was taken up into paradise, which is also the teaching of Ecclesiasticus 44:16. At the Flood, when the earthly paradise was submerged, Henoch was taken up into some unknown region of heaven, where Elias accompanied him when he was borne away on a fiery chariot. In their dwelling-place they live absorbed in the contemplation of divine things, in a state which is not that of heavenly bliss but in which they are inundated with divine consolations and enjoy continuous repose. As they have, in a certain sense, left this life and are no longer subject to trial, they cannot acquire new merits, nor grow in holiness. When, however, they return to earth at the end of the times, they will revert to the conditions of the present life, will again become liable to undergo suffering and, once more, will gain merit, whether by fighting Antichrist or by bearing witness, through their preaching and death, to Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

At first, no doubt, incredulous men will refuse to admit their identity. They will seek to lay hold of them, and punish them as mountebanks and sham visionaries; public opinion will shower them with satirical barbs and mockery, and the organs of publicity will persist in ignoring them, and pretend not to know of them. The persecutor, foaming with rage, will try to have them put to death; but, as long as their mission lasts, they will be guarded by a superior force. Here is what St. John, chapter 11, verse 5, says: "And if any man will hurt them, fire shall come out of their mouths and shall devour their enemies; and if any man will hurt them, in this manner must he be slain. These have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy; and they have powers over waters, to turn them into blood and to strike the earth with all plagues, as often as they will."

The Gospel is not so specific about the result and efficacy of the mission of these two great witnesses; but it may be taken as certain that they will undeceive a large mass of the deluded, and bring back most of those whom fear or ambition had enticed from worship of the true God. Indeed their preaching will need to have a power which no other words since those of the Gospel have ever had, since it will overcome the obstinacy of the Jews, who, bowing to the lustre of the marvels and the evidence of the facts, will return beneath the staff of the Shepherd of shepherds, to form with the Christians one flock and one fold.[74]

However, God gives His graces with due proportion. When the light has been given, when men have had all the time they need to distinguish truth from error, God, in His wisdom, will then suspend the miracle. That is how Providence invariably acts. So it was of old with Samson when, once the Philistines had been humbled and defeated, God took away from him His spirit and the stupendous strength with which He had endowed him. Heaven proceeded again in the same way with Joan of Arc: once her mission had been fulfilled, when she had routed the English and placed the crown back upon the head of Charles VII, her genius and military talent seemed to pale; she was taken prisoner, and reverted to the normal circumstances of human life. So shall it be in the case of Henoch and Elias. Besides, the miracle, if prolonged, would have no other effect than to confirm in their obduracy stubborn men who had refused to receive their words with a submissive ear and heart. In short, the two witnesses are not dead, although one of them is six thousand and the other three thousand years old, and it is necessary that they should seal their testimony by the shedding of their blood, and be subjected to the law of human nature from which Christ Himself did not desire to be spared.

[74] Qui receptus est in turbine ignis...lenire iracundiam Domini conciliare cor patris ad filium, et restituere tribus Israel. (Ecclesiastes 48:9,10)

Sicut passuri sunt Henoch et Elias, qui ultimo tempore futuri sunt apostoli. Mitti enim debent ante Christum ad praeparandum populum Dei, et uniendas omnes Ecclesias, ad resistendum antichristo, quos et persecutiones pati et occidi Apocalypsis testatur. (St. Ambrose: To the Corinthians 4)

Here, then, is what will take place, says St. John, in the chapter already quoted:

"And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the abyss shall make war against them and shall overcome them and kill them. And their bodies shall lie in the streets of the great city which is called spiritually Sodom and Egypt; where their Lord also was crucified. And they of the tribes and peoples and tongues and nations shall see their bodies for three days and a half; and they shall not suffer their bodies to be laid in sepulchres. And they that dwell upon the earth shall rejoice over them and make merry; and shall send gifts one to another, because these two prophets tormented them that dwelt upon the earth. And after three days and a half, the spirit of life from God entered into them; and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon them that saw them... And at that hour there was made a great earthquake; and the tenth part of the city fell. And there were slain in the earthquake, names of men, seven thousand; and the rest were cast into a fear and gave glory to the God of heaven."

St. John does not tell us what the fate of Antichrist will be, but St. Paul teaches that "the Lord Jesus shall kill [him] with the spirit of his mouth and shall destroy [him] with the brightness of his coming."[75]

Some have concluded from this passage that Christ is to come down in person to strike His great adversary, and that this will be the day when He will appear in His glory and majesty. This interpretation is incorrect. St. Thomas and St. John Chrysostom explain the words "quem Dominus Jesus destruet illustratione adventus sui" in the sense that Christ will strike Antichrist by dazzling him with a brightness, which will be like an omen and sign of His Second Coming. St. Paul does not at all say that Christ will kill him with His own hands, but by the spirit of His mouth, "spiritu oris sui," that is, as St. Thomas explains, by virtue of His power, as a result of His command: whether, as some believe, executing it through the co-operation of St. Michael the Archangel, or having some other agent, visible or invisible, spiritual or inanimate, intervene.[76] What is certain is that Satan will be hurled back into the darkness of the abyss, the

[75] Quem Dominus Jesus interficiet spiritu oris sui et destruet illustratione adventus sui.

[76] Cornelius a Lapide and Holzhauser say that, at the sight of the triumph of Henoch and Elias, Antichrist will be struck numb with fear; he will quiver with rage, and, in his overweening pride and infernal presumption, will attempt to maintain the nations in error by a novel and more sacrilegious hoax. With the aid of demons, he will rise majestically into the air from the Mount of Olives, and strive to reach Henoch and Elias in order to cast them down to the ground. At that grave moment, the virtue of the Almighty will strike him and throw him into the utmost ignominy and confusion. This interpretation of the Venerable Holzhauser is only an opinion, but it is possible, and does not conflict with the sacred text.

reign of the man of evil will be utterly destroyed, and his power, which aspired to extend up to the heavens, will vanish like a cloud of smoke.

Will the resurrection of the body and the Last Judgement follow close upon that great event? Holy Scripture is silent on this point, and the Church has not wished to define anything. Among the interpreters of Holy Writ, some affirm and others deny it. Suarez expresses the view that after the death of Antichrist the world will not subsist more than forty-five days. He bases his opinion on the prophecy of Daniel who, after announcing that the persecution of the man of sin will last for one thousand, two hundred and ninety days, adds these words: Beatus qui exspectat et pervenit usque ad dies 1335.[77] Happy he who has hope and holds firm until the one thousand, three hundred and thirty-fifth day.

This opinion, however, does not seem to be the most certain. The most authoritative view, and the one which appears to be most in harmony with Holy Scripture, is that, after the fall of Antichrist, the Catholic Church will once again enter upon a period of prosperity and triumph. In fact, does not St. Paul, the inspired Apostle - of all the sons of Israel the one who saw most clearly into the future and destiny of his people - seem explicitly to affirm this doctrine? Does he not affirm it when - recalling the effects of the grace and blessing obtained by the conversion of the Jews, who, in accordance with the prophecy of Malachias,[78] will not be brought back to the truth until they are enlightened by the preaching of Henoch and Elias - he exclaims, moved by a holy transport: "Now, if the offence of them be the riches of the world and the diminution of them the riches of the Gentiles, how much more the fulness of them?"[79]

These words are precise, and seem to admit of no doubt. They are in harmony with those of St. John (Apocalypse 15:2):

"And I saw...them that had overcome the beast and his image and the number of his name...singing the canticle of Moses the servant of God, and the canticle of the Lamb."

[77] Nam licet intercedant, inter mortem antichristi et adventum Christi, aliqui dies, verbi gratia decem aut viginti, considerato modo loquendi scripturae, vix existimari potest illud tempus fore diuturnius. Deinde multi colligunt ex Daniel 12, tempus illud futurum 45 dierum, quos Deus concedet hominibus, ad agendam poenitentiam post mortem antichristi. (Suarez: Disputationes, LIV, section II)

[78] "Et convertet cor patrum ad filios et cor filiorum ad patres eorum." In this passage, Malachias speaks of the same personage described in Ecclesiasticus 48; and the similarity of the terms shows that he is indeed referring to Elias.

[79] Romans 11:12.

In other words, the Christians and the remnant of the Jews henceforth have one spirit and one faith, they address the same praises and blessings to the Son of God and, together, proclaim His glory, saying: "Great and wonderful are thy works, O Lord God Almighty. Just and true are thy ways, O King of ages."[80]

Is it really credible that the day when all people will be united in this long-sought harmony will be the one when the heavens shall pass away with great violence, that the period when the Church Militant enters her fullness will coincide with that of the final catastrophe? Would Christ cause the Church to be born again, in all her glory and all the splendour of her beauty, only to dry up forthwith the springs of her youth and her inexhaustible fecundity?

However, if it may be granted that, after Antichrist, the end of the world will not come for some centuries yet, the same cannot be said of the supreme crisis which shall bring about the great unity; for, if we study but a moment the signs of the present time, the menacing symptoms of our political situation and revolutions, as well as the progress of civilization and the increasing advance of evil, corresponding to the progress of civilization and the discoveries in the material order, we cannot fail to foresee the proximity of the coming of the man of sin, and of the days of desolation foretold by Christ.[81]

[80] Et cantantes canticum Moysi servi Dei, et canticum agni, dicentes: Magna et mirabilia sunt opera tua, Domine Deus omnipotens; justae et verae sunt viae tuae, rex saeculorum. (Apocalypse 15:3)

[81] Two opinions were current in the early centuries regarding the coming of Antichrist. The first was that of the commentators who, on the basis of the text of an apocryphal epistle of St. Barnabas, maintained that the world would last six thousand years, and not one day more or less. St. Barnabas is reported to have said: Itaque, filii, in sex diebus, hoc est in sex annorum milibus, consummabuntur omnia, and, in a comment on this passage, St. Hilary says: Quotquot enim diebus hic factus est mundus, tot et millenis annis consummatur. Let us observe, first, that the Church does not place this letter of St. Barnabas among the inspired books; secondly, that, without departing from biblical truth, it is possible, beginning at the present era, to make the period when the creation took place vary, from six thousand to eight thousand years. According to very authentic, ancient documents recently discovered, and to serious, chronological studies undertaken in our own times, it would appear likely that it is now several centuries since the end of the sixth millenium of the creation of the world. So, if, at present, we are in the seventh or eighth millenium since the creation of Adam, this would be proof that the prophecy contained in the alleged letter of Saint Barnabas, which Saint Hilary is said to have believed, is, like the letter itself, erroneous and apocryphal. [Note by the publishers of the English edition. There are in fact no documents nor any other evidence which conclusively show that the world is older than six thousand years, and there is a very considerable weight of Church tradition to the effect that it is not.]

Another opinion, held for a long time from the fourth to the tenth century, was that Antichrist would appear immediately

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II

Holy Scripture gives us three main features which will mark the dominance of Antichrist. First, he will be emperor and absolute master of the universe. Secondly, he will have Jerusalem as his capital. Thirdly, he will be as clever as he is violent, and the war which he will wage against the saints will be, primarily, one of deceit and seduction.

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after the fall of the Roman Empire. This opinion was based on the meaning then ascribed to the Apostle's word "discessio," in Greek ἀποστασία. The term was interpreted in the sense of a political division, which would break the power of the Roman Empire and remove the nations from its dominion for ever. In fact, in his second epistle to the Thessalonians, St. Paul says: "et scitis quid detineat." Several Fathers and Doctors have taught that this "quid detineat" meant the Roman Empire, obliquely referred to by the Apostle so as not to arouse hatred and offend the touchy sensitivities of those in power, and concluded that the coming of Antichrist would take place when the Roman Empire had completely disappeared. St. Augustine and St. Thomas consider that, being restricted to the literal sense, this interpretation given to the passage from the Apostle lacks any serious and sound basis. In the first place, it seems strange that God should have desired to bind the destiny of His Church to that of an earthly empire. The Church is called to win over all the peoples of the earth, and to gather them beneath her staff and within her bosom. It is inadmissible that she should be reduced to keeping within the confines of any empire whatever. This view, moreover, stands in manifest contradiction to the facts. The collapse of the Roman Empire has long since been consummated. Under Constantine, the Empire divided into two branches, the Eastern and the Western. It revived in Europe under Charlemagne. At the end of the 14th century there appeared Vincent Ferrer, the Angel of the Apocalypse. He predicted that the Last Judgement was at hand, and that, before forty years had elapsed, the premonitory signs of the final catastrophe would be seen. As a matter of fact, thirty years after the death of Vincent Ferrer, Mohammed II took possession of Constantinople, and suppressed the eastern branch of the Roman Empire for ever. The western branch continued to decline until the Emperor Rudolph, head of the Hapsburg dynasty, who received his diadem from Christ through the intermediary of the successor of St. Peter. Petra dedit Petro, Petrus diadema Rudolpho.

In our century, the Roman Empire was finally brought to an end by the abolition of the electorates and the renunciation of the title, "King of the Romans", which Napoleon I obtained from the Emperor Francis II. Nevertheless, the opinion which we are contesting is true if it is understood in a different sense, and if the expression "Roman Empire" is applied to the Catholic Church, which has succeeded the Caesars. The Apostle's words "nisi venerit discessio" would then be understood as meaning the present divorce between the nations and the Church, the separation of politics from religion, of Church from State. On this interpretation, legal atheism, that is, the destruction of the public reign of Jesus Christ, the elimination of Christian-
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First, Antichrist will be lord of the world. It is abundantly clear that the effect of all the events of the present time is to prepare the social setting in which the dominance of the man of sin will be exercised.

On the one hand, the railway has reduced barriers and triumphed over distance. The telegraph allows a despot to transmit his orders from one point of the universe to the other with the instantaneousness of thought. Moreover, the peoples of the diverse races are mingling: Russian and American, Japanese and Chinese meet on the same ships, rub shoulders and cross one another's paths, in our great cities, and in the commercial centres of Europe, California and Equatorial Africa.

Already, the distant peoples of India are adopting our inventions, casting rifled guns and beginning to build armoured ships and arsenals. China - that vast empire swarming with people, where, each day, the seas and rivers engulf a huge excess of human beings whom the rich, fertile soil can no longer feed - she, too, has her mechanics, her engineers, and is learning our strategy and industrial progress. Now, have our latest wars not shown that, at the present time, the issue of battles lies above all in numbers, and that, in armies, as in the realm of politics, what determines success and wins the victory is the brutal, inexorable law of superior numbers?

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ity, its laws and institutions, is the mystery of iniquity announced by St. Paul.

In fact, it is undeniable that all governments at the present time are at work accomplishing this abominable operation of apostasy, and that they are striving to banish Jesus Christ from the school, the army, and from the very abode of justice! Are not His cross and His adorable name blasphemed and held up as a symbol of ignorance and fanaticism? Has not the Church been outlawed and excluded from the councils of governments and deliberative assemblies? Are not all the laws which are formulated marked with the seal of odious intolerance towards her, and have they any other purpose than to diminish her authority and influence? Blasphemy is raised to the level of a privilege and a right; the Roman Pontiff, dispossessed of his principality, has been a prisoner for eleven years. Parallel with the destruction of Christianity, we see the reappearance of paganism, in the form of base materialism, marked by the exaltation of all that flatters the senses, and the glorification of the basest and most brutish instincts; a paganism which pervades industry, the arts and literature, and predominates in all public institutions. Christianity is declared to be the enemy and, at the same time, materialism is presented to the aspirations of peoples as the moving force of progress, and the <u>God of the future</u>. Now, if the extremes of evil do not meet with a prompt and vigorous response, if the defection continues on its course, it may be predicted that this war on God must inevitably end in total, consummated apostasy. It is but a small step from the cult of the state, that is, the utilitarian spirit and the worship of the God-State which is the religion of our time, to the worship of the individual man. We have almost reached that point...and, proceeding from these facts and observations, we must conclude that the hypothesis of the proximity of Antichrist's coming is more probable than the hypothesis which considers his coming as remote.

Thus, the hour bids to be not far off when these millions of barbarians who populate the east and north of Asia will have at their disposal more soldiers, more ammunition and more military leaders than all other peoples; and the day can be foreseen when, having become fully conscious of their number and strength, they will hurl themselves in countless hordes upon our Europe, enfeebled and forsaken by God.[82] There will then be invasions more terrible than those of the Vandals and Huns... Provinces will be pillaged, rights violated, and small nations destroyed and ground down like dust. Then, a vast agglomeration of all the inhabitants of the earth will be observed, under the sceptre of a single leader, who will be either Antichrist, or one of his immediate predecessors. That day will see the obsequies of human freedom.

The unity of all peoples will be rebuilt, for the last time, upon the ruins of all the suppressed nationalities. The empire of evil will be accomplished. Divine Providence will scourge the world, by subjecting it body and soul to one master, the supreme head of the Masonic lodges, who will be moved solely by hatred of men and contempt of God.

Accordingly, any careful observer of the events of the present time cannot escape the conviction that everything is being done to bring about a social environment where the man of sin, by combining in his person all the depravity and every false doctrine of his age, will be produced spontaneously and effortlessly, like the parasitical tapeworm which breeds naturally in gangrenous flesh and organs.

Yet the apparently incomprehensible thing which, at first sight, no sign seems to presage, is that the seat of his empire will be Jerusalem.

Well, it is easy to see that, if the materialistic, atheistic civilization, the impending coming of which the free-thinkers and the irreligious Press are always predicting, ever dawns on the world, its centre of action and seat of public power will be Jerusalem.

In fact, when the Christian Faith has finally died out in the hearts of men - when pleasure and well-being have become the gods of the day - human activity will then have one single goal: the power of the State; one single lever and stimulus: public opinion; one inspiration and driving force: and this stimulus, this sinew, this driving force, will be gold. Gold will take precedence over religion and morality, becoming the basis of politics and the key-stone of all institutions. The pontiffs and kings

[82] Cornelius a Lapide, at a time when there was yet no question of our great discoveries, affirmed that Antichrist would have innumerable armies under his command: "Instar arenae maris;"(Apocalypse 20) "et numerus equestris exercitus vicies millies dena millia." (Apocalypse 9:16) According to the interpretation of the learned Cornelius, Antichrist's cavalry alone will consist of two hundred million men. How much greater will be the number of his infantry! (Cornelius a Lapide: Commentary on the Epistle to the Thessalonians, p.164)

will be the financiers: and the people which possesses the most gold will be the one which will soon exercise the greatest control over us.

Now, after fifty centuries of existence, nineteen of them in misfortune, a certain people is found everywhere, scattered in every quarter of the globe, meeting on the most distant shores, mingling with the whole human family, still enduring, still in search of their Messias, dreaming of rebuilding their temple and, despite all changes and upheavals, unshakable in their homogeneity and in the pursuit of their goal.

It must be said, in justice to them, that they are an active, temperate and hard-working race. If we speak of them, we do so in the abstract and solely from the point of view of their destiny and of their providential and historical mission. We should regret if our words were seen as an attack upon this people of illustrious ancestry, which has given to the world Christ, the Apostles and the Immaculate Virgin.

We, Christians and children of Israel, are closer to one another than we think. As one well-known speaker has said: Christianity is Judaism with its apex; Judaism is Christianity without its apex.

Nevertheless, the facts are there, and it is impossible for the Christian philosopher to ignore or disguise them.

Now, it is less than a century ago since this people was emancipated; and, like a flood which has burst through every dyke, they are already at the head of human affairs. Novices yesterday to civil and political life, they are now dominant everywhere, and nothing can be done in the world without them. They bribe and have at their command all the advertising agencies and the principal organs of the press. They are the creditors of the leading states of Europe. The railways, the great inventions, the banks and theatres belong to them; they are at the head of the great socialist movement which is shaking Russia, Germany, France...; they rule in the Danubian principalities, and have the casting vote in the high councils of Freemasonry, directing their operation and inspiration.[83]

[83] There are 3,338,000 Jews in Europe, Germany alone having 1,250,000 and Rumania 500,000. Total number of Jews living in the world: six million. In his book <u>La Judaisation des peuples chretiens</u>, Desmousseau quotes innumerable passages taken from <u>L'Univers</u> and the <u>Archives Israelites</u>, from which it is clear that the theology of liberal Judaism is no different from the doctrine and symbolism of the secret, Masonic societies. Hence this remarkable admission, made only a few years ago, by a British prime minister, who was himself born of Jewish blood: "The world is governed by very different personages from what is imagined by those who are not behind the scenes...and the mighty revolution, which is now being prepared in Germany, and will shortly become a second Reformation, greater than the first and, accordingly, more destructive of Catholicism, is gathering strength under the auspices of the Jews." The Chevalier Desmousseau, who published his book in 1869, believes he has grounds for saying that, out of the nine members forming the supreme council of Freemasonry, five were Israelites.

As we write these lines, what is called the anti-Semitic question is setting a formidable problem for the state, stirring Germany and Central Europe profoundly; the point at issue is the progress and ever-increasing influence of Judaism, which at present constitutes a threat to the civilization, the security and existence of Christian peoples. The question is causing serious concern to politicians and statesmen; but, since they obstinately refuse to be guided by the light of Catholicism and revealed religion, they are powerless to find the true solution.

To speak only of Prussia, a recent computation has established that the secondary and higher schools of this empire number 87,949 Protestant pupils, 20,147 Catholic pupils; and 12,371 Israelites. If we allow for the proportional figures of the population, there ought to be 79,000 Protestant pupils, 40,000 Catholic pupils and 1,800 Israelites. This disproportion gives grounds for serious thought. Out of the 1,200 law students at the University of Berlin, 600 are Israelites - and it is only six years since the doors of the magistracy and civil service were opened to Jews. If this advance continues, it is certain that, within twenty-five years, three quarters of public offices in Germany will be held by Jews. It is a fact that, at present, they are already dominant in finance, in the press, and are acting like a state within a state.

Judaism is really a confessional faith and doctrine grafted on to one nationality and race. All other peoples - Frenchmen, Italians, Germans, Spaniards - if they live for a certain time subject to the same government and form of administration, if they are ruled by the same laws and institutions - do not take long to merge, unite their interests, mix their blood and acquire the same aspirations and patriotic spirit. The Jew is unassimilable: he is planted among the other peoples in the position of a lodger, as a famous writer has said; or, rather, he considers himself an exile and captive amidst the other nations. Instead of a real motherland, he has only an ideal motherland, Palestine. Jerusalem is the only permanent city for which he yearns. In his speeches and writings, on every page of his newspapers and reviews, he manifests the hope which he has never ceased to cherish of rebuilding a new, Jewish Kingdom, either at Jerusalem or in the surrounding area.

So, it is not nationality and blood which prevents the Jews from being assimilated and sets them in open enmity with other peoples, but religion: not the religion of Moses, which they forsook and which they no longer know, save in name; but their Talmudic, rabbinical religion, a medley of absurdities and rambling fables, resting, not upon the Gospel foundation of love of neighbour, but upon the obligation to pledge a profound hatred of all that does not spring from their blood. Thus an axiom acknowledged and raised by Israel to the level of a doctrine and revealed symbol is that, each time he considers it useful to his interests, a Jew has a duty to feign conversion and to participate exteriorly in the customs and practices of a religion other than his own. Thus, it has been found that there are Jews in Germany at the present time who undergo baptism and accept Christianity in order to acquire lands, win for themselves titles of nobil-

ity and the more easily attain public positions, and who turn these advantages to account for the enrichment of the synagogue and the impoverishment of the peoples amidst whom they live.[84]

Modern liberalism, with its futile sentimentality and its false egalitarian principles, has contributed more than all other errors towards bringing about this preponderance and overwhelming tide of Jewish influence, which the European peoples with good reason fear.[85]

In the Middle Ages, the Christian nations and princes, enlightened by the Church, had foreseen this great social peril. On the one hand, they knew that they had a duty to bear with the Jews, and that it was impossible for them to make away with them, since the prophecies announce that they will subsist until the end of the times, and that only then will they return to the true Faith. On the other hand, they knew that they could not live in peace and security if they granted unrestricted freedom to such a grasping, all-pervading race. It is a fact of experience that, wherever the Jews establish themselves and predominate, they turn into despots and ravaging tyrants. That is why, denying them civil and political rights, which they would have abused - and do abuse - wherever wealth has made them masters, Canon Law granted them tolerance. It watched over them so that they might live in peace and go quietly about their activities and their commercial affairs without harming the Christians with whom they mingled; and through these wise measures the Jews were for centuries not only protected, but defended against the universal hatred, the ferment and exasperation of uncomprehending peoples.

Such is the Jewish question which, at the moment, is deeply stirring opinion in Prussia, Austria and Poland; its solution seems fraught with the gloomiest auspices. Now, if we take Israel as a whole, leaving aside the men of that nation who have fallen into rationalism and unbelief, the nucleus of the Jewish race have not ceased to nourish the same illusions that we have just indicated: still expecting a Messias, whom they continue to see as a powerful conqueror who will subdue the earth. Not long ago, one of the most authoritative exponents of the Talmud dared to say:

[84] The Roman review Civilta Cattolica, 1st April 1881, quotes the case of a Jew who, in turn, became Protestant, Catholic, was ordained priest and, finally, embraced the religious life. He himself related that, when he was a child, his father had impressed on him the axiom that man "must live in accordance with the religion of the country where he dwells, so as to spare himself difficulties and to be less disturbed in his person and in his affairs." In fact, the child was able marvellously to put this teaching into practice. From being a priest and religious, he again became a Protestant and married a Protestant woman; not long before, he had had occasion to stay in a Mohammedan country, where he had thought it advantageous to live as an authentic Mohammedan.

[85] Gambetta is the son of a baptized Jew; Reinach, his secretary, is an Israelite from Frankfurt. The deputies Naquet and See are related to Gambetta by the bond of race, that is, by their common Jewish origin. (Civilta Cattolica, 1st January, 1881)

"A new messianism must be born, a Jerusalem of a new order, set reverently between East and West, must replace the twofold city of Caesars and Popes."[86] Furthermore, it is an established fact that the majority of orthodox believers have retained, as their slogan and watchword, the remark once uttered by a famous rabbi: "Jerusalem is still the pivot of our hopes and of our faith."

Now, is it improbable that, in social conditions like ours, in which the most dreadful and unforeseen events loom up with the rapidity of steam and lightning, there may live a man who will take advantage of the chaos into which our revolutions will have cast us, and succeed in beguiling the masses and gaining mastery over minds and hearts; then, pledging himself to regenerate mankind, will send out a rallying-cry to which all his co-religionists will respond, thus achieving the conquest of universal power, a stupendous dominion over minds and bodies, a dominion accepted enthusiastically by the universality of misled, seduced peoples?

Lastly, may we not believe that this powerful and wicked man, who will imprison the world in the iron grip of an indescribable, unrestrained despotism and unify the human race through the enslavement of consciences and the humbling of spirits, will be the personage portrayed and predicted by Saint John as Antichrist, and that he will be the man whom Divine Providence has desired to use in order to undeceive Israel, who will at first have acclaimed him as her Messias and King?

Finally, what will be the characteristic marks of the persecution of Antichrist? Its main features have been described by Cornelius a Lapide and Suarez, in accordance with Scripture and the Fathers.

In the first place, what is certain and almost "of faith" is that, of all the persecutions which the Church has had to suffer, that of Antichrist will be the most terrible and the most violent.

First, because this persecution will be general, and will extend over the whole earth. It is written: "And they came upon the breadth of the earth, and encompassed the camp of the saints, and the beloved city."[87]

St. Augustine, in book 20 of the City of God, explains this text from St. John by saying that all the infidels, heretics, sectarians and depraved men, scattered over the surface of the earth, will unite with Antichrist to make war on the saints and to persecute those who are faithful to God.

Secondly, this persecution will be the most severe and violent of all because it will be inspired neither by superstition and fanaticism, nor by a blind attachment to the worship of idols, as were the persecutions unleashed by the pagan emperors. Its purpose will not be to assuage

[86] Archives Israelites, 25.

[87] Ascenderunt super latitudinem terrae et circumierunt castra sanctorum. (Apocalypse 20:8)

pride, nor to satisfy an unbridled lust for power, like the persecution of Mohammed. Nor will it be aroused by the unrestrained cupidities of the flesh and by the lure of plunder, like the one to which the German princes subjected the Church under Protestantism and in the lifetime of Luther. It will be a persecution inspired solely by hatred of God, in which God and His Christ will be directly challenged, and its sole objective will be the extermination of the divine kingship, the complete annihilation of Christianity and of all positive religion. Tiberius, Nero and the most frightful tyrants of paganism at least acknowledged an apprehension and, as it were, a distant reflection of the divinity in the idols, which they sought to compel the Christians to adore; but, in the times of which we are speaking, it will no longer be permissible to accord even a modified and corrupted adoration to any divinity. All men without exception will be forced to honour and render a cult of latria to Satan himself, personified in Antichrist, that is, in the most evil and abominable man that humanity has ever produced.

Thirdly, this persecution, which will mark the last ages, will be waged with a well-nigh irresistible seductiveness, _ut in errorem inducantur, si fieri potest, etiam electi_. Cornelius a Lapide says: _Omnes politicorum artes, dolos et praxes callebit_. At first Antichrist will convince the Jews that he is the Messias. In order to deceive them the more successfully, he will hide behind a mask of moderation and feigned holiness. When St. Paul tells us that he will have himself worshipped _in the temple of God_,[88] he seems to imply that he will rebuild the temple of Jerusalem, utterly destroyed by Titus; consequently, he will prescribe circumcision and, for a time, restore the bloody sacrifices and the other rites of the Judaic religion.

As for those who are foreign to the Jewish religion, he will draw them to himself, first, by persuasion and eloquence. He will be skilled in artifice, and will be taught by the Devil himself all knowledge useful for the ends for which the evil spirit destines him. St. Anselm tells us that he will be acquainted with all the natural sciences and will know all the sacred texts by heart.[89] In the second place, he will win men over by lavishing gold and riches. He will be the wealthiest person on

[88] Dicendum est Antichristum, praecipuam sedem Monarchiae suae Jerusalem collocaturum, ut in Jerosolymitano templo a se instaurato sedeat, et tanquam Deus adoratur. Haec est sententia Patrum omnium qui de antichristo scribunt. _Ita ut in templo Dei sedeat_ (2 Thessalonians 2). - Quamquam enim Patres, interdum aliis modis metaphorice interpretentur templum illud, tamen sensus maxime proprius et litteralis esse videtur ut de templo Jerosolymitano intelligatur. (Suarez: _Dissertatio_ LIX., act.6)

[89] Quod erit sapientia et eloquentia incredibili, et omnes artes et Scripturas memoriter sciet.

earth. Satan will deliver to him all the treasures concealed in the bowels of the sea and in the hidden depths of the earth.[90]

Fourthly, he will fill all men with admiration by his genius, and by the amazing rapidity of his elevation to the height of fortune and omnipotence.[91] As for the ignorant and the multitude, he will fascinate them by marvels, cujus est adventus secundum operationem Satanae, in omni virtute et prodigiis mendacibus.[92] St. Thomas says that, just as Christ worked miracles in confirmation of His doctrine, so also the man of sin will work false miracles in confirmation of his errors; and just as the true Christ worked wonders by the power of God, the author of all truth, so too His adversary will work, as we have indicated above, by the power of Satan, the father of fraud and lies.

Thus, the man of sin will not perform true miracles, like Jesus Christ, but will perform false and apparent ones. All his wonderful works will be, in reality, mere illusions and works of fantasy; so that, as St. Athanasius says, when he appears to resurrect a dead man, either the man whom he resurrects will not really be dead, or else, if he is dead, he will not really be restored to life. Lastly, the same saint continues, the works performed by Antichrist which appear to transcend the laws of nature will not be miracles in the true sense, but effects and phenomena of the physical order, performed through the intermediary of certain secret, hidden and natural causes. The better to beguile men, Antichrist will permit licentiousness and the dissipations of the flesh, and will stimulate the most intoxicating pleasures, totus erit in libidinibus et concupiscentiis feminarum.[93]

Fifthly, the persecution of Antichrist will be the bloodiest and most barbarous of all those which Christianity has ever suffered. Jesus Christ so assures us, when He says: "For there shall be then great tribulation, such as hath not been from the beginning of the world until now, neither shall be."[94] This can be surmised if we refer back to two causes. The first is the vast power and the stupendous instruments of force and destruction which

[90] Erit enim opulentissimus; ejus enim thesauros extollit. (Daniel 11:43). Anselmus per thesauros hos intelligit, omnem pecuniam, quae in mari vel terrae visceribus occulta delitescit; hanc enim per Daemonem Antichristo prodendam esse. (Cornelius a Lapide: Epistle to the Thessalonians, p.164)

[91] Ex fornicatione itaque nascetur, et clam educabitur, exsurget, caputque attollet, atque imperio potietur. (St. John Damascene: c. 27)

Qui consurgere habet de modica gente, id est de populo Judaeorum, et tam humilis erit, atque despectus, ut ei non detur honor regius, et per insidias et fraudulentiam obtineat principatum. (Jerome: Daniel, 11)

[92] 2 Thessalonians 11.

[93] Daniel 2:37.

[94] Erit tunc tribulatio magna, qualis non fuit ab initio mundi usque modo, neque fiet. (Matthew 24:21)

Antichrist will have at his disposal and, with these, the evil and fury of the men appointed to execute his commands. The second will be the terrifying wickedness of the devil for, says Saint John, in those days God will allow him to leave the fiery prison where he is chained, and will give him full permission to seduce and satisfy his hatred of the human race.[95] Whence it follows, says St. Cyril, that there will then be multitudes of martyrs, more glorious and admirable than those who formerly fought with lions, in the amphitheatres of Rome and Gaul.

These had to struggle against mere agents of the devil, but the confessors of the last ages will have to struggle against him who is a murderer from the beginning. To torment them, the old enemy will practise monstrous tortures with unheard-of refinements, unparalleled in past centuries, which the human mind could never have contrived to invent by itself.

Finally - the last feature of the persecution of Antichrist - it will be so violent that it will succeed in making almost the entirety of Christians apostatize. "And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them."[96] "I beheld, and lo, that horn made war against the saints and prevailed over them."[97] St. Paul informs us that Christ will not return until the great apostasy has come.[98] Interpreting these words of the Apostle, St. Augustine[99] tells us that if, in every age, we have seen believers renounce Christ on account of the wiles of heretics and the fear of persecutors and tyrants, nevertheless the defection which will take place under Antichrist is called the apostasy, properly speaking - because, in number and extension, this apostasy will exceed all that has been seen in previous times.

However, it would not be correct to conclude from this testimony that there will be none of the elect left on earth, and that the Son of God will fail to keep the promise made to His Church, when He said: Propter electos, dies breviabuntur, because of the elect the days will be shortened. Moreover, St. John, in his Apocalypse adds: "And all that dwell upon the earth adored him, whose names

[95] Cum consummati fuerint mille anni, solvetur satanas de carcere suo, et exibit, et seducet gentes quae sunt super quatuor angulos terrae. (Apocalypse 20)

[96] Et est datum illi bellum facere cum sanctis et vincere eos. (Apocalypse 13).

[97] Ecce cornu illud faciebat bellum adversus sanctos, et praevalebat eis. (Daniel 7)

[98] Nisi venerit primum discessio. (2 Thessalonians 2)

[99] City of God, book 20.

are not written in the book of life."[100] St. Augustine tells us that, in the reign of Antichrist, there will be multitudes of martyrs who will display a heroic constancy, and also a number, more or less large, of confessors who will manage to escape into caves and high or sheer mountains, and God will see to it that these sanctuaries shall elude the vigilance and investigations of the persecutors, and will not permit the devil to point them out to them.

Daniel tells us that, at the time when this terrible persecution breaks out, the abomination of desolation will openly sit enthroned in the holy place. "The king shall do according to his will," says Daniel. "He shall be lifted up and shall magnify himself against every god: and he shall speak great things against the God of gods...and he shall make no account of the God of his fathers...and he shall not regard any gods."[101]

"Once the man of sin has cowed the human race by his threats and entangled it in the meshes of his lies and wiles, he will observe no restraint, show his hand and act openly. He will not permit anyone to worship or invoke any other god than himself, and will proclaim himself sole lord of Heaven and earth. Wherever he is not present in person, men will be obliged to pay homage to his image or statue: Et elevabitur, magnificabitur adversus omnem Deum. He will tolerate neither the Mosaic religion, nor natural religion itself. He will persecute with equal thoroughness Jews, schismatics, heretics, deists and every sect that recognizes the existence of a supreme being and the immortality of the life to come. Yet God, in His wisdom, will draw good from evil. The horrible tempest which His justice has allowed to be unleashed upon the earth will result in the disappearance of false religions. Along with Judaism, it will abolish the remains of Mohammedanism, idolatrous superstitions and every religion hostile to the Church.

"It will deal the finishing blow to the sects of darkness. Freemasonry, Carbonarism, Illuminism and all subversive societies will vanish in the vortex of wickedness which will be their work, and which they had prepared for centuries in the belief that it would be their definitive, supreme triumph. They will have assisted unintentionally in the establishment of the reign of unity foretold by Our Lord: erit unum ovile et unus pastor. (John 10:16)

[100] Adorabunt bestiam omnes qui habitant terram, quorum non sunt nomina scripta in libro vitae. (Apocalypse 13)

[101] Et faciet juxta voluntatem suam rex; et elevabitur, magnificabitur, adversus omnem Deum; et adversus Deum Deorum loquetur magnifica... Et Deum patrum suorum non reputabit nec quemquam Deorum curabit. (Daniel 11:37) It is true that the prophet also intends, by these words, to depict the persecution of Antiochus and the fury against the Lord's people which will fill this prince. Nevertheless, as Suarez observes, Antiochus was only the image of Antichrist, and the evils to which he subjected the faithful Jews are meant to be a brief outline of those which the Christians of the last days will endure.

The triumph of the wicked one will be of short duration; but the consolations which follow will be universal, abundant, proportionate to the extent of the tribulations which the Church will have suffered.

A son of Israel, converted not long ago, and to-day a priest and doctor, captivated by the grand spectacle which the Church of God will present in that fortunate era when Jews and Gentiles, seated at one and the same banquet, have become one and the same family, under the crook of a single shepherd, exclaims in a transport of joy:

"In the life of Christ on earth, there were two great days of triumph when He was acknowledged as Messias and King: the feast of the Epiphany, which was a kind of morning feast, which the assembled nations, represented in the persons of the Magi, gave to Jesus Christ; and Palm Sunday, which was the evening feast, given belatedly to Christ by Jerusalem: Palm Sunday, the day of Israel's acclamations.

"Now to-day, after nineteen centuries of fidelity, the great feast of the Epiphany is forgotten by the nations and their leaders, who have rejected Christ and His Church. Let me then, in the eventide of the Church's life, salute the great Palm Sunday and the unexpected outburst of acclamation from the old race of Jacob. Let me salute and sing of this day, when the doors of the synagogue will be opened, amidst wild rejoicing, for the triumphal entry of the Messias, whom she has so long awaited but not acknowledged. Let me sing of the day when the remnant of Israel will strew their garments upon the path of Christ and His Church, and the air will be fragrant with perfume from that blood which, this time, will fall as a stream of love upon Israel and her children. O feast of Palms, rise forth over the Church... Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered together thy children, as the hen doth gather her chickens under her wings; but this time, O Jerusalem, you will have desired it, you will have flung yourself beneath the wings. Hosanna and everlasting glory to Jesus Christ in the highest, and to the Church wherein Israel, after a long absence, has found again her Messias and King."[102]

However, the final consummation will not come yet, as it is written (Apocalypse, chapter 11):

"And the seventh angel sounded the trumpet, and there were great voices in heaven" - voices of angels and of virgins, together with the voices of confessors and holy martyrs, will hail Christ with praise and acclamations, giving thanks for His victory over Antichrist, and for the extermination of the wicked. All men, now become worshippers of one and the same God, all professing the same faith, united in the same adoration, sharing the same table, will exclaim in chorus: "The kingdom of this world is become Our Lord's and his Christ's... We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, who art and who wast and who art to come; because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and thou hast reigned."[103]

[102] Abbe Lehman: Les Nations Fremissantes.

[103] Apocalypse 11:17.

THIRD CONFERENCE

The resurrection of the dead and the General Judgement

> Ecce mysterium vobis dico:...in momento, in ictu oculi, in novissima tuba (canet enim tuba), mortui resurgent incorrupti.
>
> Behold, I tell you a mystery... in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall rise again incorruptible.
> (1 Corinthians 15: 51-2)

I

The world must have an end, and that end will not take place until Antichrist has appeared.

Protestantism and unbelief reject the individuality of Antichrist. They consider him to be a mere myth, an allegorical, imaginary person; or else they see this man of sin, foretold by St. Paul, as nothing more than the leader of the anti-Christian fight, the chief and messias of Freemasonry and the sects, raised up in order to bring civilization to its zenith, by liberating it for ever from the darkness of superstition - in other words, eliminating all positive religion and every revealed truth from the whole surface of the earth.

Among the truths relating to the end of our destiny in time, there is one which is particularly repugnant to human passions, one which rationalism and free-thinking assail ceaselessly and remorselessly, making it the target of their most astute sophistry and of their most audacious denials. That doctrine - the most glorious and most consoling of all doctrines for our human nature - is the future resurrection of our bodies. Sometimes, as St. Paul found at Athens, unbelieving science seeks to crush the doctrine beneath the weight of its derision and sarcasm; at other times, as happened at the tribunal of the praetor Felix, it turns pale on hearing it mentioned, and feels terror-stricken: "Disputante autem illo...de judicio futuro, tremefactus Felix respondit... Vade: tempore autem opportuno accersam te."[104]

It is clear from this passage, and from many others recurring at various points in the epistles of St. Paul, that the dogma of the resurrection of the dead was the favourite and popular subject of the Apostle's preaching.

[104] Acts 24:25.

He expounded it boldly in the praetoria, in the synagogues and in the areopagus of the wise men and philosophers of Greece. In the eyes of St. Paul, this doctrine of the future resurrection is the foundation of our hopes, the solution to the mystery of life, the principle, crux and conclusion of the whole Christian system. Without it, divine and human laws would be devoid of all sanction, and spiritual doctrines would be an absurdity. Wisdom would consist solely in living and enjoying like the animals; for, if man is not to live again after death, the just man who fights against his own feelings and checks his passions would be senseless. The martyrs, who suffered for the honour of Christ and let themselves be torn apart by lions in the amphitheatres would have been only trouble-makers and freaks.[105] Once it is granted that the destinies of man are limited within the bounds of the present life, there is no happiness in this world except in the crassest and most brazen materialism. The only true Gospel, the only sound, rational philosophy is that of Epicurus, summed up in the words: Manducemus et bibamus, cras enim moriemur - Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we shall die.[106]

In order to turn souls away from gross cravings, and raise them up to aspirations worthy of their heavenly origins, the Apostle does not cease to instil this great truth; and, at the same time, he draws from it the consequences which bear upon the ordering of life, and the external and internal regulation of human acts.

"Behold I tell you a mystery. We shall all indeed rise again; but we shall not all be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall rise again incorruptible; and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption; and this mortal must put on immortality. And, when this mortal hath put on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: Death is swallowed up in victory.

"O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?"[107]

In the preceding verses the great Apostle explains, no less wonderfully, the theological reason and the sovereign excellence of this mystery, of which God has made him the interpreter and herald.

"[The body of man]...is sown in corruption: it shall rise in incorruption. It is sown in dishonour: it shall rise in glory. It is sown in weakness: it shall rise in power. It is sown a natural body: it shall rise a spiritual body... The first man Adam was made into a living soul; the last Adam into a quickening spirit... The first man was, of the earth, earthly; the second man, from Heaven, heavenly... Therefore, as we have borne the image of the earthly, let us bear also the image of the heavenly. Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot possess the kingdom of God; neither shall corruption possess incorruption."[108]

[105] 1 Corinthians 15:32.

[106] 1 Corinthians 15:32

[107] 1 Corinthians 15:51-55.

[108] 1 Corinthians 15:42-50

Here we have a statement, drawn up by a master-hand, clear and concise; and any interpretation which the human word might seek to add would serve only to weaken its vigour and clarity.

Such is also the true, Catholic faith, which the Church has inscribed in the Creed which we recite, and which she ordains to be sung in her places of worship on solemn feasts.

"I believe in the resurrection of the body, I await the resurrection of the dead."

Both St. Athanasius, in his creed, and the Fourth Lateran Council express this truth in terms no less precise and even more explicit: "All men," they say "must rise again with the same bodies with which they were united in the present life."

In fact, if, after being dissolved and returned to the dust from which they came, our bodies were not to be reborn with their entire limbs and the totality of their corporeal, constituent parts; if they were not to reappear with the same faces and the same features, so that, when we saw one another again on the day of judgement, we would recognize ourselves immediately, there would then be no point in calling our rebirth a resurrection, but a new creation.

Thus it is quite certain that, at the judgement, we shall be in every respect the same: the feet which will support us then will be the feet which have borne and sustained us during our exile and the days of our pilgrimage in time; the tongue through which we shall speak will be the one which once gave voice in divine praise or in blasphemy; the eyes which will enable us to see will be the self-same ones which opened to the rays of the sun which shines upon us; the heart which will beat in our breasts will be the very heart which the ardours of divine love will have consumed, or which will have let itself be devoured by the impure flames of lust.

Such was the unshakable hope of Job. As he sat on his dunghill, wasted away by putrefaction but with an unruffled countenance and shining eyes, the whole span of the ages flashed through his mind. In an ecstasy of joy he contemplated, in the brightness of the prophetic light, the days when he would shake off the dust of his coffin, and exclaimed: "I know that my Redeemer liveth... Whom I myself shall see, and my eyes shall behold and not another."[109]

This doctrine of the Resurrection is the key-stone, the pillar, of the whole Christian edifice, the pivot and centre of our Faith. Without it there is no redemption, our beliefs and our preaching are futile, and all religion crumbles at the base:

Inanis est ergo praedicatio nostra, inanis est fides nostra.[110]

[109] Job, 19:25,27.

[110] 1 Corinthians 15:14.

Rationalist writers have declared that this belief in the Resurrection was not contained in the Old Testament, and that it dates only from the Gospel. Nothing could be more erroneous. We need only read through the long line of Mosaic tradition, listening to the great voices of the patriarchs and the prophets, to see that they all tremble with joy and hope at the prospect of the promised immortality, and celebrate this new life, which will become theirs beyond the grave, and will have no end. It is said in the Book of Exodus: "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." In St. Matthew, Christ uses this passage to prove to the Jews the truth of the Resurrection:

"And concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read that which was spoken by God, saying to you: I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob? He is not the God of the dead but of the living."[111]

Did not the mother of the Machabees, standing amidst the blood and the scattered, mutilated limbs of her sons, strike the evil Antiochus dumb with fear, when she said to him:

"But thou, a wicked and of all men most flagitious, be not lifted up without cause with vain hopes, whilst thou art raging against his servants... For my brethren, having now undergone a short pain, are under the covenant of eternal life."[112]

For the saints of the Old Testament, this belief in the Resurrection was not only a symbol and a speculative doctrine; it was their fundamental faith, expressed in the marvels and works of their lives, of which the institutions they left us were representative types. St. Jerome says:

"Chief among them was Abel, whose blood, crying out to the Lord, bore witness to his hope in the resurrection of the dead. Next came Henoch, carried off so that he might not see death: he is the type and image of the resurrection. Thirdly, Sara, whose barren womb, exhausted with old age, conceived and brought a son into the world, gives us hope of resurrection. Fourthly, Jacob and Joseph left instructions for their bones to be gathered up and honourably buried, thereby confessing their faith in the Resurrection. Fifthly, the withered rod of Aaron which blossomed and gave fruit, and the rod of Moses which, at God's command, became alive and turned into a snake, offer us a shadow and an outline of the resurrection. Finally, did not Moses, who blessed Ruben and said, let Ruben live and not die, when Ruben had long since departed from this life, acknowledge that he desired for him resurrection

[111] De resurrectione mortuorum non legistis quod dictum est a Deo dicente vobis: Ego sum Deus Abraham, Deus Isaac et Deus Jacob? Non est Deus mortuorum sed vivorum. (Matthew 22:31)

[112] Tu quidem scelestissime in praesenti vita nos perdis, sed rex mundi defunctos nos pro suis legibus, in aeternae vitae resurrectione suscitabit. (2 Machabees 7)

and eternal life?"[113] And if these various testimonies were to be deemed mere allegories or mystical testimonies, we would conclude this list with the very explicit words of Daniel, which leave no doubt about the constant and universal faith of the Old Testament in the future Resurrection:

"And many of those that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake: some unto life everlasting, and others unto reproach to see it always."[114]

This truth, affirmed by Scripture, is proclaimed no less boldly by reason and by Christian philosophy.

Philosophy covers in its vast field all that pertains to the nature of God, the nature of man and that of the world. Now the dogma of the Resurrection belongs to the ideas which philosophy gives us on these three subjects, which fall within its realm and are the matter of its investigations.

In the first place, the dogma of the Resurrection follows from the ideas which philosophy gives us on the nature of God. Christian philosophy teaches us that God is the efficient, the first and the final cause of all the creatures in the world. Having freely created them, with absolute sovereignty and independence, He has marked them all, to a greater or lesser degree, with the character of His own likeness and His infinite perfections. However, the human body, made by His own hands and enlivened by His breath, is the epitome of His marvels, the masterpiece of His wisdom and divine goodness. By the beauty and elegance of its construction, the nobility of its bearing and the splendours which shine through it, the body of man is infinitely superior to all the material beings which have come from the hands of God.

It is through the body that the mind reveals its power and exercises its kingship. It is the body, Tertullian says, which is the organ of the divine life and the sacraments. It is the body which is washed by the water of baptism, so that the soul may obtain its purity and clarity. It is the body which is anointed by the oil and the unction of the Holy Ghost, so that the soul may be consecrated. It is upon the body that hands are imposed, so that the soul may be enlightened and can communicate blessings. It is the body which receives the Eucharist, and quenches its thirst with divine blood, so that man,

[113] Primum, Abel cujus sanguis ad Dominum clamat spem ressurectionis corporum ostendit. Deinde Enoch translatus ut mortem non videret: est resurrectionis typus. Tertio Sara sterilis et senili utero, juxta promissionem concipiens et pariens spem resurrectionis praebet. Quarto Jacob et Joseph, propriorum ossium curam habentes ressurectionis fidem ostendunt. Quinto, virga Aaron, germinans et fructum producens, et virga Moysis quae juxta Dei voluntatem animabatur, et serpens fiebat, resurrectionem adumbrabat. Denique Moyses benedicens Ruben, hunc in modum: Vivat Ruben et non moriatur, cum jam Ruben vita functus esset, resurrectionem et aeternam vitam ei postulare visus est. (St. Jerome: Epistle contra Samaritanos)

[114] Multi de iis qui dormiunt in terrae pulvere evigilabunt, alii in vitam aeternam, alii in opprobrium. (Daniel 12:2)

becoming one with Christ and sharing with Him the same life, may subsist eternally.[115]

Again, it is the body which crosses the hands in prayer and bows in adoration. It is the body which is emaciated by fasts and mortification, which offers itself as a holocaust on scaffolds and stakes, and is consumed in martyrdom, which state is not absolute and irrevocable until it is sealed by death and expressed in blood. And could the body of man - instrument of the most heroic deeds, channel of all graces and blessings, champion of Christian witness, priest and altar of sacrifice, and virginal spouse of Christ - be like the grass in the fields, bursting forth into life for a moment, only to become the prey of worms and the guest of death forever? That would be a blasphemy against Providence and an affront to His infinite goodness.

The dogma of the Resurrection of the dead follows from the ideas which Christian philosophy gives us about God; it follows, in the second place, from the ideas which this philosophy gives us about the nature of man.

Man is really composed of two substances: spirit and body. These two principles are united by links so intimate and profound - there is between them such a close reciprocity and inter-relationship - that, were it not for the instrumentality of the body, the spirit, by its very nature, would be inapt to exercise any of its functions.

It would be like a puff of wind which, in the absence of an organ, could not resound, or a lyre with loose and broken chords, which would no longer disturb the air and would remain without tune or echo.

Thus, without the body, the soul cannot enter into a relationship with the eternal, visible world; it has neither the use of sight, nor the use of hearing; it cannot exercise its action and its sovereignty over matter, nor gain control over the elements, nor savour fruit, nor breathe in fragrance.

The mouth itself - the mouth which may have held forth in words of wisdom, which has so often opened to teach or to praise - is no more than a withered, arid member which the soul can no longer use to move hearts and enlighten minds. No doubt, as St. Thomas teaches, God, will confer upon the separated souls after their death, a form of existence which will enable them to know one another, to hold communication among themselves, without the aid of corporal organs of which they will have been deprived. That, however, will be a marvellous and exceptional means, beyond the normal conditions and laws of human beings.

What is certain is that, in itself, and leaving aside that capacity which God, by His power, will add to our inner constitution after death, the soul deprived of its body is but an isolated, mutilated substance, cut off from all communication with the world of the living.

[115] Caro abluitur ut anima emaculetur; caro ungitur ut anima consecretur. Caro saginatur ut et anima muniatur; caro manuum impositione adumbratur ut et anima Spiritu illuminetur: caro corpore et

If you ask why God saw fit to unite, in one and the same creature, two principles so disparate, so different in their essence and properties, as mind and body; why He did not wish man to be, like the angels, a pure spirit, I will reply that God so acted in order that man might be truly the king and the epitome of all His works; so that he might, after the manner of Christ, incorporate in his personality the totality of created elements and beings, so that he might be the centre of all things and, by bringing together mind and body, the visible and invisible order, serve as interpreter of both, and offer them simultaneously to the Most High, in his homage and adoration.

Hence it is that, if man were to be deprived for ever of his body, the material and visible creation would no longer have any mediator or pontiff, no longer have any voice to address its hymn of gratitude and love to God, and the link which unites inanimate being to the Creator would be irreversibly broken.

So, if God has not resolved to cast His work back into the void forever, if this earth, sanctified by the footsteps of Christ, is destined, once radiant and renewed, to subsist eternally, then man must rise again in a future life to reconquer its sceptre and kingship. Hence, once more, it follows that death means not ruin but restoration. If God has decreed that our earthly abode shall one day be dissolved, it is not for the purpose of despoiling us of it, but to render it subtle, immortal, impassible. His aim may be compared with that of an architect, says St. John Chrysostom, who has the house-owner leave his house for a short period, in order to have him return with greater glory to that same house, now rebuilt in greater splendour.

The propriety and the necessity of the Resurrection follow from the nature of man; they follow, lastly, from the laws and nature of the world.

The law of the world, says Tertullian, is that everything is renewed and nothing perishes. Thus the seasons follow one another in their course, the trees loose their fruit in autumn, and their leaves turn yellow and dry, like an adornment which has faded; but, when autumn gives way to spring, the trees become green again, their buds spring forth, and their leaves adorn themselves with a new crown of flowers and fruit. Thus the grain and the seed, laid in the furrows of the land, wither and appear to dissolve, from the effect of humidity and the action of the air; but, by the time of the harvest, they will have broken through the surface of the soil, and been born again in greater splendour, rejuvenated and renewed, as an ear of corn. In the same way, the sun, at the close of the day, disappears in the shades of its twilight, and seems to sink beneath the depth of the ocean; but in the morning it appears anew at the appointed time, to illuminate the earth and enkindle the air with its light and fire.

Death is only slumber, a latent state. It is a state of rest and silence, where creatures, apparently motionless and buried, take on a new shape and assume a new vitality and a new energy: in the tomb where they sleep they undergo a process of incubation and recasting, from which they will emerge more free and transformed, like a torch which has gone out and is rekindled with greater brilliance by the vivifying breath of men; or again, like the insect which pulls itself over the mud of the ground and which, having been enclosed in its shell, emerges with a new strength, spreads out its shining wings, and [illegible]ly upon flowers.

At this point, certain questions need to be elucidated. It is said that the dead will awaken at the sound of the trumpet. It is said that all will rise again, but that all will not be changed. Finally, it may be asked whether men will rise again in the state and at the same age as when they died in this world.

In the chapter on the fear of the judgement, quoting the words of St. Paul, "...at the last trumpet, for the trumpet shall sound," St. Jerome says: "At the sound of the trumpets, the whole earth will be stricken with fear," and, further on: "Whether you are reading or sleeping, writing or keeping watch, let that trumpet always resound in your ears."[116]

Will this trumpet, the echoes of which will penetrate the murky caverns of the abyss and awaken the fathers of the human race from their long slumber, give out an audible sound? It seems probable. The angels who, on that day, will assume aeriform bodies in order to be seen by all men, may also construct, out of the elements and diverse substances of the air, material instruments capable of emitting real sounds. However, if we feel reluctant to accept this explanation, we can keep to the interpretation of St. Thomas, who tells us that St. Paul uses the term "trumpet" only allegorically, as an image. Just as, among the Jews, the trumpet was used for summoning the people to the great feasts, urging on the soldiers in battle and giving the signal to strike camp, so the voice of the angel is called a trumpet by analogy, by reason of its power and glitter, and the ability it will have to summon all men, in an instant, to the same place.

Secondly, it is said that all men will rise again, but that not all will be changed. It is certain that the damned will rise again, possessed of all their physical and intellectual faculties and all their limbs, and that their bodies will not be subject to any illness or change; but, lacking the nuptial robe of charity, they will not be clothed in the qualities of the glorified bodies. They will be reborn neither transfigured, nor luminous, nor subtle, but such as they were on earth - passible, opaque, shackled to matter and to the law of gravity. They will not feel the intensity and violence of the fire any the less thereby; and this fire will cause them the greater suffering because, being in a perfect state of health and in full possession of their physical and intellectual vigour, they will be all the more conscious of its energy and action. The fire of the damned is a fire lit by the breath of God's justice, created solely to punish; consequently, its severity is not at all proportionate to the weakness or diversity of temperaments. It is measured according to the number and gravity of the crimes to be punished, as it is said: ignis eorum non extinguetur. This fire will consume without destroying. It will cling to its victims as to a prey, without their organs being affected by it, and without their flesh ever feeling any tear or injury. [117]

[116] Tunc ad vocem tubae pavebit terra; sive leges, sive dormies, sive scribes, sive vigilabis, haec tibi semper buccina in auribus sonet. (St. Jerome: <u>De timore judicii</u>)

[117] As for children who die unbaptized, the theologian Suarez says: Haec omnia communia sunt infantibus qui in solo peccato originali decesserunt; solum erit differentia, quia horum corpora licet ex interna dispositione sint passibilia, tamen actu nihil patientur, nec fatigabuntur, neque inordinatum aliquem motum sentient et ita...

Lastly, will men rise again the same age as they were when they died?

The most probable opinion, and the one most in harmony with Scripture, is that they will rise again "in the state of perfect man, according to the age of the fullness of Jesus Christ: in virum perfectum, in mensuram aetatis plenitudinis Christi."[118] In other words, when all men have been restored to the type and image of Christ, at least as far as befits the number and degree of their merits, they will be reborn in the maturity of manhood, in the full development of their being and physical constitution, just as Christ on the day of His Resurrection and Ascension when, entering upon His bliss, He took possession of His eternal sovereignty.

Finally, will Jesus Christ be the sole author of the Resurrection, or will it be brought about through the ministry of the angels? We say that it will be accomplished directly by the power of Christ, but that the angels too, who are His ministers, will be called upon to co-operate and lend their assistance. For it is said in St. John, chapter 5: "...the hour cometh, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God." Furthermore, it is said in Matthew 24: "And he shall send his angels with a trumpet and a great voice; and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds..."[119]

Thus Jesus Christ, as king and leader, will give the signal; He will utter His command, and leave His angels the task of gathering together the scattered elements which have belonged to our bodies, and which are destined to reconstitute them.

To these truths founded on Holy Scripture, mocking, sceptical science raises objections, drawn from the laws which bind the present order, and which it considers decisive and irrefutable.

How, they say, will the angels or, indeed, any other superior beings, however great be their degree of perception, ever manage to gather up and separate the remains and particles of human bodies, scattered over every continent, dispersed beneath every firmament, engulfed in the seas, some dissolved, others turned into vapour or vegetable sap, some of them having served in turn to form a multitude of organized, living beings? Since the same particles of substances will have belonged at different times to an infinite diversity of bodies, will it be within the power of an angel to assign them to one particular person, rather than another?

It is easy for us to reply that, when the angels receive the command to gather together the ashes of the dead, whether with the aid of their natural knowledge or assisted by a revelation from above, they will immediately know which are the elements and material parts that must form each human body; they will know in which place on sea or land these material parts lie, and in what form they subsist. There is a pious belief that each angel will concern himself particularly with the human creature whom God had once entrusted to his care. Can it be supposed that these good angels forsake the remains of those crea-

[118] Ephesians 5:13.

[119] Mittet angelos suos cum tuba et voce magna et congregabunt

tures over whom they had watched with such loving kindness and solicitude? That they do not follow them through all their transformations and that, at the required moment, they do not have the means and the power to find the ashes? Furthermore, are not the angels God's delegates? How, then, can it be admitted that God, Who sees all things, Who is present in the atom, in the blade of grass, in each grain of sand on the sea-shore, will be unable to make them distinguish the particles of our bodies, which His gaze embraces, and in which He lives substantially by His immensity?

Let us note, however, that the ministry of the angels will be limited to gathering together, at the appointed place, the remains and particles of our bodies; as for the arrangement of these different pieces - the spirit of life which will again be infused into our reconstituted bodies - that, says St. Thomas, is a creative work which exceeds the power of the angelic nature itself, and which will be wrought by the direct, immediate power of God.

Hence the reason why the Resurrection will be instantaneous: it will be accomplished in the twinkling of an eye, says St. Paul, in an imperceptible instant, in a flash. The dead, asleep in the slumber of many centuries, will hear the voice of the Creator, and will obey Him as promptly as the elements obeyed Him during the six days: Dixit et facta sunt.

They will shake off the binding-clothes of their age-long night and free themselves from the grip of death, with greater nimbleness than a sleeping man awakening with a start. Just as, of old, Christ came forth from His tomb with the speed of lightning, cast off His shroud in an instant, had the sealed stone of His sepulchre[120] lifted aside by an angel, and hurled the guards, half-dead with fright, to the ground, so, says Isaias, in an equally imperceptible space of time, death will be cast forth: Praecipitabit mortem in sempiternum.[121]

Ocean and land will open up their depths to eject their victims, just as the whale which had swallowed up Jonas opened its jaws to throw him out on the shore of Tharsis. Then human beings, free, like Lazarus, of the bonds of death, will rush transfigured into a new life, and will insult the cruel enemy which had felt sure that it would keep them fettered in endless captivity. They will say: "O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting? Absorpta es, mors, in victoria tua."

There is one senseless and crass objection, which we think it right to point out: it is the one raised by the materialists of our time.

The human body, they say, is composed and recomposed unceasingly, through age, sickness, changes of elements, and especially by nutrition. It is subject to constant and

[120] Our Lord did not remove the stone which closed the entrance to His sepulchre by breaking it, as some have thought. It was the angel who took it or rolled it away. St. Antoninus of Plaisance, who lived in the sixth century, declared that, during his travels in the Holy Land, he saw this stone, which was round, like a millstone.

[121] Isaias 25:8.

perpetual loss and renewal. The limbs can wither or grow fat, the hair falls out and grows again. It has been ascertained that, of the blood and humours which made up the material structure of the child, not one single particle remains in old age.

Will all this dust, all these different and incalculable remains which have gone to form his organic life, be restored to man once he arises from his ashes? If they are not given back to him, if he is still deprived of them, how can it be said that he will be born again, with the same body to which he was united in this life? If, on the other hand, he rises with the totality of the elements which have gone to make his constitution, then the bodies of the resurrected elect, which, it is said, must be filled with harmony and perfection, will in fact be just a mass of shapeless, defective elements.

True science has long since made short work of the inconsistency and absurdity of such a theory. In our times, a publicist of great profundity, an eminent theologian, knowledgeable in the natural sciences as well as in the sacred sciences, has disproved by an irrefutable argument these doctrines, which are as base as they are presumptuous and foolish:

"In the body of a man," he says, "there is both something essential and something adventitious and accessory. The essential part is what he shares with no one, what he alone possesses and will possess for ever; it is the part of him which existed at the moment he was informed, animated and vivified by his soul. These essential elements he will always keep; they will always be his. The rest, that which is produced by nutrition, digestion and assimilation, is not he. He can lose it, and does lose it, without ceasing to be himself. It will be with these essential, personal elements that God will resurrect the glorious, spiritual bodies, as also He will resurrect the immortal corruption of the damned. The soul being the same, the real kernel, the constitutive element remaining the same, the rest is of little importance and its identity will subsist eternally.

"Moreover, it has been painstakingly demonstrated, first, that in a body as large as the earth, there are enough gaps and pores for it to be conceived as being reduced to the volume of a grain of sand; secondly, that, conversely, in a grain of sand, there are enough separable parts, atoms and molecules for a globe as large as the earth to be formed from them. In view of these two utterly overwhelming mysteries of nature, dare we dispute the possibility or impossibility of the reconstitution of the human body, with its essential original elements?"[122]

[122] Moigno: Splendeurs de la foi.

[Note by the publishers of the English edition. Fr. Arminjon has in fact been misled by the dogmatic assertions of nineteenth century so-called scientists, who were the forerunners of the even more dogmatic twentieth century scientists, into believing that a mere theory is a proven fact. Atomic theory may or may not represent reality, but it is a theory and nothing more. No one has even proved that there are such things as atoms, or the existence of all the components which atoms have been "discovered to contain" - electrons, neutrons, protons and the rest. A short discussion exposing atomic theory is included in an appendix to an essay called Einstein and Modern Physics by N.M. Gwynne, which examines the whole myth that modern physics consists of and the part played by

Let us conclude this account of the resurrection by recalling its magnificence and sublimity. The resurrection will be a grand, imposing spectacle, surpassing all those of which the earth has ever been the setting, and eclipsing even the solemnity of the first creation. Of the former, the most beautiful picture depicted for us comes from the prophet Ezechiel, chapter 37, verses 1 to 13:

"The hand of the Lord was upon me and brought me forth in the spirit of the Lord and set me down in the midst of a plain that was full of bones. And he led me about through them on every side. Now there were very many upon the face of the plain and they were exceedingly dry.

"And he said to me: Prophesy concerning these bones and say to them: Ye dry bones hear the word of the Lord.

"Thus saith the Lord God to these bones: Behold I will send spirit into you and you shall live. And I will lay sinews upon you and will cause flesh to grow over you and will cover you with skin: and I will give you spirit and you shall live and you shall know that I am the Lord.

"And I prophesied as he had commanded me. And as I prophesied there was a noise, and, behold, a commotion: and bones came together, each one to its joint. And I saw, and, behold, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin was stretched out over them: but there was no spirit in them.

"And he said to me: Prophesy to the spirit, prophesy, O son of man, and say to the spirit: Thus saith the Lord God: Come, spirit, from the four winds and blow upon these slain and let them live again.

"And I prophesied as he had commanded me: and the spirit came into them, and they lived: and they stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army.

"And he said to me: Son of man: All these bones are the house of Israel. They say: Our bones are dried up and our hope is lost and we are cut off. Therefore prophesy and say to them: Thus saith the Lord God: Behold, I will open up your graves and will bring you out of your sepulchres, O my people, and will bring you into the land of Israel."

II

With the resurrection accomplished, the immediate consequence is the judgement, which will take place without delay. It is impossible to imagine the innumerable members of the human family, made up of the long line of generations, massed together over the confined space of the surface of the earth, trying to recognize the traces of the places where they once dwelt, and again reduced to sprinkling them with the sweat of their brow and wrangling over the ownership of the land.

It is evident that mankind, once resurrected, will enter upon another mode of existence, and that divine goodness is bound to open up new abodes, new habitations.

These habitations will be of different kinds, according to the merits or demerits of each person. The just will enter the empyrean heaven, the damned will fill up

It is pointless to refute those godless men who deny this supreme manifestation of justice and solemn climax of human destiny.

The general judgement is a certain fact, announced by the prophets; it is a truth which Jesus Christ constantly stresses, a truth ratified by reason and consonant with the law of conscience and every idea of equity.

In Holy Scripture, each time that the judgement is spoken of without any qualification and each time that this day of judgement is designated by the words "dies Domini, dies irae" or other similar terms, these expressions must be understood as referring to the general judgement, which will take place at the end of the times. Thus, it is written: "But I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgement than for you."[123] "...it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgement than for thee"[124]; "...the day of the Lord shall so come as a thief in the night."[125] "We beseech you, brethren," says St. Paul, "...that you be not easily moved...as if the day of the Lord were at hand."[126] The prophets are full of similar words: "The great day of the Lord is near," says the prophet Sophonias. "That day is a day of wrath, a day of tribulation and distress, a day of calamity and misery, a day of darkness and obscurity, a day of clouds and whirlwinds, a day of the trumpet and alarm..."[127]

Christ speaks more explicitly in St. Matthew, chapter 13: "Suffer both [the wheat and the cockle] to grow...and in the time of the harvest, I will say to the reapers: Gather up first the cockle and bind it into bundles to burn, but the wheat gather ye into my barn."

Elsewhere, in the same Gospel, chapter 13 verse 47, He says: "The kingdom of heaven is like to a net cast into the sea and gathering together of all kind of fishes. Which, when it was filled, they drew out; and, sitting by the shore, they chose out the good into vessels, but the bad they cast forth.

"So it shall be at the end of the world. The angels shall go out and shall separate the wicked from among the just; and shall cast them into the furnace of fire. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

"Have ye understood all these things? They say unto him: Yes."

[123] Dico vobis, Tyro et Sidoni remissius erit in die judicii. (Matthew 11:22)

[124] Terrae Sodomorum remissius erit in die judicii. (Matthew 11:24)

[125] Dies Domini, sicut fur in nocte, ita veniet. (2 Thessalonians 5:2)

[126] Non cito moveamini, quasi instet dies Domini. (2 Thessalonians 2:2)

[127] Juxta est dies Domini magna. Dies Domini amara, dies irae, dies tribulationis et angustiae, dies calamitatis, et miseriae, dies tenebrarum et caliginis, dies tubae et clangoris. (Sophonias 1:14)

Let us add to these texts from Scripture the testimony of St. Thomas, who gives us three theological reasons for the opportuneness and propriety of a universal judgement.

The first of these reasons consists in the fact that the works of man, whether they are good or bad, are not always isolated, transitory acts; more often, especially in the case of the leaders of nations and those who are invested with public authority, they continue to subsist after they are concluded, either in the memory of other men or in public acclaim, as a result of the consequences they have had and the scandal they have caused. Thus, at first sight, a particular, secret crime seems to be only a private, personal deed; but it becomes social on account of its effects.

Certainly it is of faith that there is a particular judgement, and that every man, at the instant of his soul's departure from the body, appears before the tribunal of God to hear his eternal sentence pronounced. Yet this judgement cannot suffice, and it is essential that it should be followed by another public judgement, in which God will not examine the actions in isolation and taken in themselves, but will examine them in their effects upon other men, in the good or evil deriving from them for families and peoples - in a word, in the consequences which they produced and which those who perpetrated them ought to have foreseen.

The second reason given by the Angelic Doctor for this public manifestation relates to the false judgements and mistaken appraisals of human opinion. Most men, even the wisest and most enlightened, are easily outwitted and deceived by others. They do not discern the innermost depths of souls, and cannot reach what is secret and interior in them: hence it happens that they generally form their judgements on appearances, on what is visible and exterior. Again, it follows that good men are often treated with undeserved severity, that they are unappreciated and injured in their reputation. On the other hand, the wickedness of a large number of men remains unknown, they everywhere enjoy public esteem and trust, and the world accords them that consideration and praise which is due to the just alone. So a judgement is necessary which exposes every pretence, unmasks all hypocrisy, and lays bare hidden ruses and all false and base virtues. This judgement, St. John tells us, will not take place "according to the flesh, nor according to that which the eyes see and the ears hear": it will be accomplished in the dazzling splendour of the light of God, in the discernment of all intentions and all desires, the full intuition of the most secret and mysterious recesses of the heart: corda omnium intuendo.[128]

Lastly, a third reason given by St. Thomas is that God governs men by means adapted to the circumstances of their nature, and will judge them according to the promises He made them and the hopes which He aroused in them; whether rewarding or punishing them, He owes it to His wisdom to keep to the laws and limits of distributive justice such as He has fixed them in this life. Now,

[128] Non est secundum carnem. (John 8) - Nec secundum visionem oculorum, aut auditum aurium.(Isaias 2) - Sed corda omnium intuendo. (Kings 16)

St. Paul himself calls the present life a course, a race, an arena;[129] he portrays man as a traveller on this earth, under the figure of a soldier or athlete rushing after his crown; he holds forth before us the prospect of eternal life, which he calls by the names of "palm, trophy, crown of justice, crown of life and glory." In order, then, that the reward may really match the promise, it has to be bestowed at a public assembly, with a pomp and ceremony worthy of Him who confers it, in the presence of all those who have taken part in the battle, of all the enemies over whom the saints have triumphed, following the manner in which ancient Rome and Greece used to act towards their victorious warriors and heroes.

In what place will the last judgement be held? No one knows with the certainty of faith, but the general opinion of the Fathers, and that of St. Thomas, is that it will be in the valley of Josaphat.

Holy Scripture gives this name to the region through which flows the Cedron torrent, which includes within its boundaries the town of Jerusalem and also Calvary, and extends as far as the Mount of Olives. Is it not, indeed, fitting that Christ should manifest Himself in His glory in the very places which were the scene of His agony, where He appeared in His sufferings and humiliations? Such was what the angels implied, when they said to the disciples: Hic Jesus qui assumptus est a vobis sic veniet - This Jesus who is taken up from you shall so come. Is it not also most appropriate that the part of the earth where the first man was created,[130] where the Son of God wrought the redemption and salvation of men, should likewise be the one where the saints will receive the fullness of the fruits in His Passion and Death, where they will take part in His glorious Ascension, and where Jesus Christ will exact a just vengeance on His persecutors, and on all those who have refused to wash their souls by the infinite power of His blood?

It is for this reason that the prophet Joel exclaims in chapter 3: "And the Lord shall roar out of Sion and utter his voice from Jerusalem." Again, in the same chapter, he says: "I will gather together all nations and will bring them down into the valley of Josaphat: and I will plead [i.e. dispute] with them there for my people..."[131]

Therefore it is an indubitable truth that the judgement will be held in the valley of Josaphat.

[129] Nescitis quod qui in stadio currunt, omnes quidem currunt, sed unus accipit bravium? Sic currite ut comprehendatis. (1 Corinthians 9:24) - Corona justitiae, vitae et gloriae. (2 Timothy 4:8)

[130] It is not of faith that Adam was created on Calvary, but simply a tradition.

[131] Dominus de Sion rugiet, et de Jerusalem dabit vocem suam (Joel 3:16). Congregabo omnes gentes et educam eas in vallem Josaphat et disceptabo cum eis super populo meo.

It is useless to object that our view cannot be sustained and that it is sufficiently refuted by the fact that the valley of Josaphat occupies a space less extensive and more confined than most of the Alpine valleys; and that, consequently, it could not possibly hold the thousands of millions of human beings who have followed one another, or will yet follow one another, on earth.

St. Paul, in his epistle to the Thessalonians, resolves and throws light on this difficulty: he reminds us that on the day of judgement the resurrected elect will not be massed together on earth, but "shall be taken up... to meet Christ, into the air." Our Lord Jesus Christ will descend into the region of the air, situated above the valley of Josaphat, and there, surrounded by His angels, He will sit on the throne of His Majesty. Is it not indeed fitting that, by reason of His dignity, the judge should be raised above all, on an elevated spot, from where He can be seen and heard by all men? Is it not equitable that, in consideration of merit and perfection, an honorable place nearer the Sovereign Judge should be assigned to the elect, who have been released from the laws of gravity and, possessing glorious and subtle bodies, will no longer need the earth for support? The reprobate alone will be detained on earth;[132] but, as Suarez points out, we should be wrong to imagine them restricted and confined within the narrow limits of the valley of Josaphat; their enormous number will extend, so far as necessary, into the surrounding area, to the Mount of Olives, the mountain of Sion, the site where Jerusalem stood and, perhaps, to remote areas.

If it is said that the judgement will take place in the valley of Josaphat, this is because Christ will set up His throne above it, and because this valley will be the place in which mankind will begin to assemble.

By whom will the judgement be executed? By Christ Jesus; not precisely by Christ Jesus as God, who shares the same substance and the same life with His Father, but by Christ Jesus inasmuch as He became incarnate in time and is called the Son of Man. It is said in St. John, chapter 5: "For neither doth the Father judge any man; but hath given all judgement to the Son, that all men may honour the Son, as they honour the Father."[133] He gave Him

[132] Unum vero superest dubium explicandum si omnes justi futuri sunt in aere, damnati vero in terra, quomodo ad litteram intelligendum sit, illos futuros esse ad dexteram, hos vero ad sinistram Christi. Dupliciter responderi potest. Primo, intelligendo ad litteram, dici potest omnes reprobos, etiamsi in terra sint, collocandos esse ad partem sinistram Christi, bonos vero in aere ad dexteram. Secundo modo et melius dicitur more Scripturae dexteram et sinistram significare felicitatis et infelicitatis, honoris vel abjectionis locum. Anselmus, XXXIV in Matthaeum sic exponit: A dextris, id est in aeterna beatitudine. A sinistris, id est in aeterna miseria. (Suarez: Question LIX, Article VI.)

[133] Neque enim Pater judicat quemquam: sed omne judicium dedit Filio ut omnes honorificent Filium, sicut honorificant Patrem. Et potestatem dedit ei judicium facere quia Filius hominis est. (John 5:22,23,27.)

power to judge, "because he is the Son of Man." Indeed, as God, Jesus Christ is equal to the Father, the expression and image of His sovereign power, and possesses, co-naturally with the other two divine Persons, the right to judge which They have. From this point of view, Christ does not have to receive a second investiture, and it is only in considering Him as a man that St. John could say that He will be honoured by all, because of the judicial power conferred upon Him by His Father.

In the following verse, St. John teaches us that Christ has received the power to restore the dead to life. "I say unto you that the hour cometh, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God."[134]

This passage makes clear that the power to resurrect, conferred upon the Son of man, is a consequence of His capacity as judge. It is essential for the exercise of judicial authority, that he who is invested with it should have the means of summoning the guilty and bringing them up before his tribunal. As the judgement has to be executed over men, observes St. Thomas, it must be adapted to their capacities, it must take account of the demands and inclinations of their nature. Man, however, is composed of a soul and a body; he apprehends spiritual and invisible things only through the agency of tangible things: that being so, is it not essential that man should be judged by a man, by a being who appears in the flesh, whose face he can see and whose voice he can hear? Rightly, St. John tells us: "et potestatem dedit ei judicium facere, quia filius hominis est." ("And he hath given him power to do judgement, because he is the Son of man." John 5:27)

Furthermore, if we study things after our way of thinking, must not the judge be seen by all men summoned to his bar? Now, inasmuch as He has a human form, Christ will be seen by the just and the wicked simultaneously; inasmuch as He has a divine form, He can show Himself to the elect alone. Lastly, God the Father has entrusted the judgement to Jesus Christ, as man, in a spirit of kindness, in order to temper the brilliance of this awesome manifestation, and to soften its severity and rigour; for the Church tells us in her liturgy:

> What horror will invade the mind
> When the strict Judge, who would be kind,
> Shall have few venial faults to find!
> (Dies Irae)

If Christ were to appear in the aspect of a superior and altogether celestial nature, what human being would manage to bear the weight of His majesty and the fire of His gaze? He will appear, then, with the face and form which He had during His mortal life; He will have His Cross and the other marks of His humiliations precede Him; He will let the scars of the wounds in His feet and hands be seen: Videbunt in quem transfixerunt; the reprobate will no longer dare to oppose His justice, and the good in their turn will feel drawn to Him in deeper trust. The heart of St. Paul was filled with joy and hope: as he reflected that Christ was to be his judge, he felt all

[134] Amen, amen dico vobis, quia venit hora et nunc est, quando mortui audient vocem Filii Dei, et qui audierint, vivent. (John 5:25)

his fears and distrust vanish. "Who shall accuse against the elect of God?" he said. "God is he that justified. Who is he that shall condemn? Christ Jesus that died; yea, that is risen also again; who is at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."[135]

As for the manner of this second coming, it will be like the first: sic veniet quemadmodum vidistis eum euntem in coelis; it will be the same Christ and the same man, and His features and appearance will be the same as during His mortal life; it will be enough for those who lived and spoke with Him to set eyes on His person in order to recognize Him. However, this second manifestation will not come in weakness and humiliation, but in majesty and glory. St. Matthew's Gospel says: "I say to you, hereafter you shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of the power of God and coming in the clouds of heaven."[136] In other words, Jesus Christ will appear surrounded by the pomp and apparel of divine kingship. The glorified elect and the multitude of angels will form a resplendent court around His throne, such as no mind could portray. Those who have fought with the greatest constancy, who have followed Him the most closely in the arena of His sufferings, will be the nearest to His person. "Then shall the just stand with great constancy," says the Book of Wisdom, "against those that have afflicted them and taken away their labours."

We can imagine the regrets and despair of the damned by virtue of the picture which the same inspired author draws of them:

"These seeing it shall be troubled with terrible fear, and shall be amazed at the suddenness of their unexpected salvation.

"Saying within themselves, repenting, and groaning for anguish of spirit: These are they whom we had some time in derision and for a parable of reproach.

"We fools esteemed their life madness and their end without honour.

"Behold how they are numbered among the children of God, and their lot is among the saints.

"Therefore we have erred from the way of truth, and the light of justice hath not shined unto us, and the sun of understanding hath not risen upon us."[137]

The apostles, martyrs, doctors and thousands of the just, who have fought for the honour of God and for the interests of the Faith, will unite with their leader in proclaiming the truth of His sentences, and the equity of His judgements.

[135] Quis accusabit adversus electos Dei? Deus qui justificat. Quis est qui condemnet? Christus Jesus qui mortuus est, imo qui et resurrexit, qui est ad dexteram Dei, qui etiam interpellat pro nobis. (Romans 8:33,34)

[136] Verumtamen dico vobis, amodo videbitis filium hominis sedentem a dextris virtutis Dei et venientem in nubibus coeli. (Matthew 26:64)

[137] Wisdom 5:1-6

This judgement is rightly called universal because it will be exercised over all members of the human race, because it will cover every crime, every misdemeanour, and because it will be definitive and irrevocable.

In the first place, the last judgement will be exercised over all members of the human race.[138]

The men of every nation, every tribe and every tongue will appear at it. There will be no more distinction of wealth, birth and rank among them. Those whose names were Alexander, Caesar and Diocletian will be jumbled together with herdsmen who, at this moment, are grazing their flocks on unknown, deserted shores, where the ashes of these masters of the world lie scattered. Men will then be ruled by concerns other than those of curiosity and empty admiration. Far more serious spectacles will hold their gaze and attention; the figure of the world will have passed away, and the victories of great captains, the works conceived by genius, the enterprises and great discoveries, will be deemed mere shams and child's play.

Just as in the theatre, says St. John Chrysostom, when an actor goes off the stage, it is not because of the part he has played that people admire him; they praise neither the fact that he has imitated the personality of a king, nor the fact that he has acted a lackey or a beggar: rather, they praise his skill, and they applaud only the perfection with which he has played his part. So at the last judgement, a man will not be honoured because he was a king, an eloquent orator, a minister and a great statesman. All these honours and distinctions, which the world holds in such high esteem, will be deemed of no merit and of no value. Men will be praised solely for their virtues and good works: Opera enim illorum sequuntur illos.[139]

Secondly, this judgement is called universal, because it will cover every crime and offence.

Only then will human history begin. In the clarity of the light of God, all the crimes, public and secret, which have been committed in every latitude and in every age, will be seen clearly and in detail. The whole life of each human being will be laid bare. No circumstance will be omitted: no action, word or desire will remain unknown. We shall be reminded of the different periods we have gone through; the lustful man will have his disorderly living and libertine speeches set out before him; the ambitious man, his devious, Machiavellian ways.

The judgement will unravel and bring out all the strands and the duplicity of those intrigues, so cleverly hatched; it will set out in their true light all those base repudiations of principles, those craven acts of complicity, which men invested with public authority have sought to justify, whether by invoking the specious pretext of reasons of State, or by covering them up with the mask of piety or disinterestedness. The Lord, says

[138] Inde venturus est judicare vivos et mortuos.

[139] Apocalypse 14:13.

St. Bernard, will reveal all those abuses which people concealed from themselves, all those unknown dissipations, those planned crimes where the only thing lacking was the actual commission; those pretended virtues and those forgotten, secret sins, blotted out from the memory, will appear suddenly, like enemies darting out from an ambush: Prodient ex improviso et quasi ex insidiis.

Without doubt there are men so hardened in evil that the thought of this terrible manifestation has little effect upon them. Being familiar with crime, they treat it as a subject of amusement and boasting. And without they fondly imagine that they will assume the same effrontery at the judgement, and, by their cynical, arrogant attitude, defy the majesty of God and the conscience of the human race. Vain hope! Sin will no longer be viewed from the opinion of carnal men, ready to excuse the most violent outbursts because they do not harm any neighbour, either in his goods or in his life. The foulness and disorder of sin will be revealed in the ineffable clarity of the light of God. Sin, says St. Thomas, will be judged as God Himself judges it: Tunc confusio respiciet aestimationem Dei quae secundum veritatem est de peccato.

Three main classes of men will draw attention to themselves.

The first of these will be the sons of justice and light, whose merits and good works will be extolled, and given public approbation and praise by the perspicacious, infallible Judge, Whose testimony can admit of no error or contradiction.

In the second class will be the sons of Voltaire, the leaders of free-thought and the Revolution who, at the present time, are hatching dark and sacrilegious plots against Christ and His Church. They will be terror-stricken, and they will tremble with unspeakable horror, when they see appear in His glory and omnipotence Him Whom they had wished to crush, Whom they had stigmatized by calling him enemy, fool and the infamous one. They will utter a final scream of rage and malediction, crying out like Julian the Apostate: Thou hast conquered, Galilean!

The third category of men who will be given special attention at the judgement will be composed of the sons of Pilate, the worshippers of the golden calf and the chameleons of wealth and power. Clouds without water, as St. Jude calls them, drifting along with every opinion and doctrine, with no other religious or political compass than that of their ambition, always ready to ride roughshod over their conscience and their principles; speculating on the blood of souls, for lack of gold, and delivering up Christ like the Roman money-lender, in order to purchase the honours and goodwill of the master of the moment.

This hideous, repellent type recurs continuously, with the same characteristics, at every period of crisis and social unrest. St. John, in his Gospel, has popularized this archetype of lying and cowardice in a figure of speech for ever popular and living, in which all our Pilates in

legislation and government, who sell the just man for the sake of procuring favours and lucrative honours, will be eternally recognized. Such men as these will learn at the judgement that it is not expedient to serve two masters. They will curse the straw Caesars to which they rendered that which they refused to render to God, and will exclaim: "Ergo erravimus. Therefore we have erred.[140]"

Finally, the last judgement is called universal, because it is definitive and irrevocable.

The judgement is irrevocable, because there is no level of jurisdiction higher than God's, and there can be no appeal from absolute justice to relative and limited justice. So there will be no reinstatement, no partial or complete amnesty. Divine sentences are irreformable, and He Who sees all things, Who has foreseen the crux and conclusion of human destiny in the eternal decrees of predestination, is not a being likely to go back on His judgements. What He has said, He will fulfil; what He has done, He will confirm. What He once desired will remain eternally fixed, for Heaven and earth will pass away, but the Word of God will not be subject to any error or change. Coelum et terra transibunt, verba autem mea non praeteribunt.[141]

These great truths make little impression on us, because the day of their fulfilment is only a faint prospect, set in the distant future, and because we fondly imagine that, between now and the time when they are fulfilled, we shall mitigate their severity. It is true that the deliberations of these great assizes still lie ahead of us, but the preliminary examination has begun and it continues. It is written: "The eyes of the Lord are upon the just... But the countenance of the Lord is against them that do evil things...he that loveth iniquity hateth his own soul."[142]

Just as, in our times, the telegraph has become a marvellous means of communication among men, instantaneously transmitting our orders and our every word from one point of space to another with the rapidity of lightning, so there is likewise a divine telegraph: each of our thoughts, the very moment it is conceived, each of our words, as soon as it is uttered, is immediately transcribed in indelible letters, and with frightening accuracy, into that great book mentioned in the sacred liturgy, where it is said: Tunc liber scriptus proferetur, in quo totum continetur, unde mundus judicetur.[143]

Let us not, then, be intimidated by the arrogance and dark threats of the wicked, we who, at this moment, are subjected to violence and oppression, whose rights are unrecognized and trampled underfoot, and who, exposed to the ruses and machinations of faithless men, suffer the odious excesses of despotism and force. If God is silent and seems at this moment to be asleep, He will unfailingly

[140] Wisdom 5:6.

[141] Matthew 24:35.

[142] Psalm 33:16; Psalm 10:6.

[143] Text of Office of the Dead: Dies Irae.

awaken in His own time. We repeat, the examination has begun, the files of evil men are complete, the witnesses have been summoned and the evidence has been requisitioned. If the most solemn hearing of all has been adjourned, it is for a short period only.

The story is told of a proud, valiant and high-minded prince of Brittany, who was defeated and taken prisoner by a fierce rival and sent to languish in a dark dungeon, where he was kept short of air, bread and sunshine; his end was not long in coming, amidst horror and under the pressure of a coldly calculated, slow torture. On the point of death, the victim addressed a summons to his murderer in these terms:

"I appeal against your violence and your barbarism to the Supreme Protector of the oppressed, and in a year and a day I shall summon you to appear with me at His divine tribunal." When the day came, the murderer did indeed pass from life to death.

We are not a prophet, and we should not venture to summon at such short notice all wicked men, the pamphleteers of free-thought, the instigators of unjust laws, those who violate the honour and liberty of the family, and the rights and virtue of children; but that those men who defy God and deride His threats will one day have a minute and rigorous account to render to His justice...is an absolutely certain truth...and, sooner or later, they will settle that account. On the day of solemn reparation, the wicked who called the just fools, who glutted themselves on their tortures and tears, like starving men devouring bread, will learn to their cost that God does not suffer Himself to be mocked, and that there will be no impunity or licence for the benefit of crime and evil.

All wrongs will be strikingly redressed. The blood of Abel which washed the earth will gush out over Cain, and raise an accusing voice against him. St. Peter will demand an account of Nero for the torture to which he sentenced him. Mary Stuart will call down the divine vengeance upon the head of Elizabeth of England, her murderer. All the saints will cry out with one voice to God: Usquequo, Domine, non judicas et non vindicas sanquinem nostrum de iis qui habitant in terra.[144]

It will be a great court of appeal, to which an immense number of cases, famous on earth, will be referred, where an infinite number of judgements which fear, ambition or self-interest have dictated to men, will be irrevocably annulled, where, in a word, Providence, against which fools blasphemed on earth, with accusations that it was harsh, unjust and blindly partial, will provide complete justification for its ways, as it is written: Ut vincas cum judicaris.[145]

[144] Apocalypse 6:10.

[145] Psalm 50:6.

The story is told of a man in Germany who lived by himself, and was held in renown on account of his holiness and his works; he cured the sick, restored the sight of the blind and drew the people of the surrounding area to his dwelling. The Emperor Otto determined to go to visit him; captivated by the words of wisdom which flowed from the saint's lips, his admiration knew no bounds: "Father," he said, "ask of me what you please and, were it half my kingdom, you will receive it."

The saint's expression became solemn, and, majestically, he raised his head, crowned, as it were, with a diadem of nobility and virtue; placing his hand upon the emperor's breast, he solemnly replied: "Prince, I have no use for your crown and your treasures; but I ask of you one favour, that, amidst the pomp and fascination of your omnipotence and majesty, you should withdraw each day, for a few moments, into the hidden recesses of your heart, in order to reflect upon the account which you will one day render to God; for, as St. Clement, the pope, says: Quis peccare poterit, si semper ante oculos suos Dei judicium ponat, quod in fine mundi certum est agitandum? Who shall be able to sin if he always places before his eyes the judgement of God which will certainly be exacted at the end of the world?"[146]

Let us do likewise and say with the prophet: Cogitavi dies antiquos et annos aeternos in mente habui - I thought upon the days of old: and I had in my mind the eternal years.[147] Let us judge ourselves rigorously, and we shall not be judged. Let us live with the Lord Jesus all the days of our life, and then we shall be freed from all fear, for there is no condemnation upon those who dwell with the Lord Jesus: Nihil ergo nunc damnationis iis qui sunt in Christo - There is now therefore no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.[148]

[146] St. Clement: Epistle to James.

[147] Psalm 76:6.

[148] Romans 8:1.

FOURTH CONFERENCE

The location of immortal life or the state of the glorified bodies after the resurrection.

> Et dixit qui sedebat in throno:
> Ecce nova facio omnia.
>
> And he that sat on the throne said:
> Behold, I make all things new.
> (Apolcalypse 21:5)

The visible sky and the earth where we live are no more than a place of passage, a mobile tent pitched for a day, the preparation and crude sketch of a better world.

The present world is like a workshop where everything is in ferment and labour. The elements break against each other and decompose, to assume new forms; they are borne swiftly along in mutual pursuit; every creature groaneth and travaileth in pain, even till now: Omnis creatura ingemiscit et parturit usque adhuc.[149] They sigh for the day when, freed from bondage and corruption, they will enter into the glory and liberty of the sons of God, when the Creator will renew them in a more perfect and harmonious order.

That is why the world will have an end, in the true sense of the word, and, by transforming earth and sky, this end will make the universe the place of immortality.

One of the leading lights of contemporary science has spoken these sublime words: "No doubt the earth, in its perpetual revolutions, seeks the place of its repose."

Leibnitz said: "The world will be destroyed and reconstructed within the space of time which the spiritual government deems fitting." Again, a writer of the Protestant school has said: "It is probable that this rich variety is seeking its unity. All creatures will gather in a school of goodness and beauty. The flowers of all worlds will be assembled in the same garden."[150]

[149] Romans 8:22.

[150] Herder: Idee sur la Philosophie, book 1, ch.2.

There is, moreover, one of our Master's sayings, which makes this expectation a certainty. The Lord tells us: "Heaven and earth shall pass...the stars shall fall from Heaven and the powers of Heaven shall be moved."[151] The Prophet [David] had once said: "In the beginning, O Lord, thou foundedst the earth: and the heavens are the works of thy hands. They shall perish but thou remainest: and all of them shall grow old like a garment: and as a vesture thou shalt change them and they shall be changed." (Psalm 101: 26,27)

In what state will creation and all creatures be, when they have irrevocably broken their ancient fetters and matured into repose - into full and consummated life? Will the earth still turn upon its axis? Will the heavenly bodies, moving along at a dizzy speed, revolve around their centre as they do now? Will the stars continue to emit only a faint, cold gleam amidst the immensity of space? These are grave and mysterious questions, which it would be futile for human reason to seek to resolve, if it were not aided by the light of revelation. Yet, no one will dispute that this study on the place of immortal life and of man's dwelling place in the age to come is a study, incomparably more serious and worthy of our attention than those narrow studies which captivate men, the sole object of which is to snatch from the changing, ephemeral nature of this world a few of its vain, worthless secrets.

Men such as rationalists and pantheists, who do not share our hopes but who, nevertheless, accept immortality and a future life, do not know how to define the circumstances in which the spirits will live after death. They imagine them as useless, erratic figures, wandering around

[151] Unbelievers have derided this fall of the stars, landing on the earth like hailstones. Was the Son of God - we may reply - unaware that there are other centres of attraction in the world besides the earth? He did not say that the stars would fall upon the earth, but that the stars will fall. [Note by the publishers of the English edition. The argument which Fr. Arminjon uses here is in fact invalid because, although in Matthew 24:29 Our Lord says what Fr. Arminjon attributes to Him, nonetheless in Apocalypse 6:13 Holy Scripture explicitly says: "And the stars from heaven fell <u>upon the earth</u>."] At the present day, groups of stars have been oberved, in other words, groups of suns having a common centre of gravity, around which they describe, not circles and ellipses, but spirals; these spirals culminate in the centre; they are thousands of worlds which are coming together and will for ever be but one. (P. Gratry: <u>De la connaissance de l'ame</u>, vol.2, p.368) See the article "Stellae cadent," by Fr. de Bonniot, in the <u>Etudes Religieuses</u> of the Fathers of the Society of Jesus, October, 1879.

[Note by the publishers of the English edition. Once again Fr. Arminjon shows that he has allowed himself to be misled by the assertions and unproved assumptions of nineteenth century scientists. There is no objective evidence of stars or suns describing circles or spirals or anything else, nor indeed of any of the so-called fixed stars moving at all in relation to one another. Moreover it will be noted in Fr. Arminjon's next paragraph in the main text that he asks if the earth will "still turn on its axis," which there is no evidence of its ever having done - indeed quite the contrary. The relevant scientific facts relating to these subjects have been put together in two essays, available from the publishers, called <u>Galileo Versus the Geocentric Theory of the Universe</u> and <u>Sir Isaac Newton and Modern Astronomy</u>, both by N.M. Gwynne.]

in ethereal, undefined space, not restricted to any fixed abode, like shadows bereft of their consciousness and personality, immersed in that supreme being called the <u>all in all</u>; or like rivers, sunk in the depths of the ocean. A fantastic, imaginary immortality, which is simply a cold picture of eternal gloom, a dark dream of fate and nothingness.

Holy Scripture contradicts all these fables and idle hypotheses. It teaches us that at the time of the second advent of Christ the earth in which we live and the sky which gives us light will be the scene of two contrasting changes.

The first of these changes will be the complete destruction of the present physical order. St. Peter says: "...the day of the Lord shall come as a thief, in which the heavens shall pass away with great violence and the elements shall be melted with heat and the earth and the works which are in it shall be burnt up."[152] Thus this visible world, once engulfed by the waters of the Flood, is destined to perish once more, and will be set aflame. The same cause which brought about the Flood will produce the final cataclysm; the earth will be destroyed, because the sins of men have soiled it. The elements will be entirely dissolved because, albeit without their own volition, they were made subject to vanity. The heavens will be hurled back with extraordinary swiftness because they too, in the words of Job, are not pure in the sight of the Lord.[153]

The second change, however, - the total restoration of creation - will take place as soon as the ruin of the universe has been consummated. This radiant, predestined temple, which the Lord will build as the most striking manifestation of His glory, cannot be for a single moment darkened and profaned by the presence of the reprobate. It will be only when these have been engulfed in the depths of the earth, and when the words "infernus et mors missi sunt in stagnum ignis - Hell and death were cast into the pool of fire" (Apocalypse 20:14) have been fulfilled, that material creation will be set free and God will proceed with the great renovation.

St. Augustine says: "When the judgement has been accomplished, heaven and earth will cease to subsist." St. Peter (in 2 Peter 3:13) declares: "...we look for new heavens and a new earth, according to his promises, in which justice dwelleth."[154]

The universe will then be subjected to other laws; the sun and the heavenly bodies will no longer execute their revolutions, and the heavens and the earth will remain stable and at rest. False science vainly protests against the affirmations of the Sacred Books, and alleges that they are at variance with the laws of matter and the principles governing the elements: but how do we know that movement is an essential property of the elements and

[152] Adveniet autem dies Domini, sicut fur in quo coeli magno impetu transient, elementa vero calore solventur, terra autem et quae in ipsa sunt opera exurentur. (2 Peter 3:10)

[153] Coeli non sunt mundi in conspectu Domini. (Job 15:15)

[154] Novos vero coelos et novam terram secundum promissa ipsius expectamus. (2 Peter 3:13)

matter?[155] Matter and the elements created for man are only his servants and auxiliaries: the Creator desired to adapt them to our circumstances and mode of existence. Now, when we are travellers and live in impermanence, matter is subject to alteration and change; but when man comes into the realm of the perpetual and absolute, the elements will be brought into harmony with the new life with which he will be endowed. Time will be no more: Quia tempus non erit amplius, nor will there be henceforth any mutation of years and days. "The sun shall go down no more and thy moon shall not decrease."[156]

"For the Lord shall be unto thee for an everlasting light: and the days of thy mourning shall be ended."[157]

Thus, creation will not perish: the temple of immortality will not be an ethereal, incorporeal place, as some imagine and teach, but a material abode and a city. St. Anselm describes this new earth when he says: "This earth, which sustained and nourished the holy body of the Lord, will be a paradise. Because it has been washed with the blood of martyrs, it will be eternally ornamented with sweet-smelling flowers, violets and roses which will not wither."[158]

William of Paris, after declaring that the animals, plants and mineral substances themselves will be burnt and destroyed by fire, adds: "A large number of learned men among Christians consider that, after the resurrection, the earth will be bedecked with new, evergreen species and incorruptible flowers, and that a perpetual spring-time and beauty will therein prevail, as in the paradise in which our fathers were placed."[159] The following words of the Prophet seem to concur with the view expressed by these two doctors: Send forth thy spirit, and they shall be created; and thou shalt renew the face of the earth."[160]

As for the order, dimensions and structure of the temple of immortality, St John depicts it for us in chapter 21 of the Apocalypse.

In fact, in order to give us a picture of such transcendental realities, which go beyond the conceptions

[155] Juxta veriorem philosophiam coelum ex peculiari ac propria natura non magis postulat motum quam quietem; sed in ordine ad naturam universalem seu generalem mundi gubernationem, illud dicitur esse illi magis naturale quod iuxta totius universi statum magis consentaneum, magisque accomodatum fuerit. (St. Thomas: Summa Theologica, quaest. v, de Potent. A.S.)

[156] Non occidet ultra sol, et luna ultra non minuetur. (Isaias 60:20).

[157] Quia erit tibi Dominus in lucem sempiternam et complebuntur dies luctus. (Isaias 60:20)

[158] Terra quae in gremio suo Domini corpus confovit, tota erit ut paradisus, et quia sanctorum sanguine est irrigata odoriferis floribus, rosis, violis immarcessibiliter erit decorata. (St. Anselm: in Elucid.)

[159] De terra quidam ex sapientissimis Christianorum discerunt, quod graminibus semper virentibus, et immarcescibilibus floribus, ac perpetua amaenitate, instar paradisi terrestris, sit decoranda. (William of Paris: Cujus verba refert Carthusianus)

[160] Emitte spiritum tuum et creabuntur et renovabis faciem terrae. (Psalm 103:30)

of our mind, he is obliged to resort to enigmatic images and to obscure, mysterious expressions. To bring out the perfection and harmony of this glorious city, he tells us that it is built entirely of polished, hewn stones. In order to describe its richness and splendour, he tells us that "it had a wall great and high, having twelve gates, and in the gates twelve angels...and the city lieth in a four square, and the length thereof is as great as the breadth. And he that spoke with me measured the wall thereof, a hundred and forty-four cubits...and the building of the wall thereof was of jasper-stone; but the city itself of pure gold, like to clear glass. And the foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, a chalcedony; the fourth, an emerald; the fifth, sardonyx;...the twelfth an amethyst. And the twelve gates are twelve pearls, one to each, and every several gate was of one several pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, as it were, transparent glass..."[161]

All these expressions and images are to be understood in the figurative sense, and interpreted allegorically.

There are, however, certain characteristics to be kept in mind, which signify that the abode of the glorified elect will present no analogy with the places where we live in this world. St. John tells us in the same chapter that there will be no temple, for the reason that the all-powerful Lord God and Lamb are themselves the temple.[162] Nor will there be sun or moon any more, because the brightness of God is the light, and the immolated Lamb is Himself the lamp.[163] We may, by analogy and induction, conclude that there will be no courts of law, because there will be no wars or strife. Nor will there be any more despots or tyrants, since the Lord will be the strength and the ornament of the inhabitants of this city, and will ordain that they shall reign eternally: Quoniam Dominus illuminabit illos, et regnabunt in saecula saeculorum - Because the Lord God shall enlighten them, and they shall reign for ever and ever.[164] St. John himself gives grounds for all these various interpretations when he tells us, in Apocalypse 21:27, that "there shall not enter into it any thing defiled, or that worketh abomination or maketh a lie," and when he informs us in the preceding verses that "the gates thereof shall not be shut by day; for there shall be no night there. And they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into it."

What is certain is that everything in this city will be peaceful and divinely ordained. Sorrow and envy will be for ever banished from it; for, as St. Augustine explains, "sorrow and envy proceed from our evil passions and desires, which make us covet another's goods; but, in the city of God, there will no longer be any desires, since all those that the elect have ever felt will be entirely satisfied: the Lamb will quench their thirst in the stream of living water, and their thirst will be

[161] Apocalypse 21:11-21.

[162] Apocalypse 21:22.

[163] Apocalypse 21:23.

[164] Apocalypse 22:5.

fully quenched."[165] Secondly, there will be no such goods to covet. In the Holy City, the goods and the wealth will be none other than the God-Charity, Who will give Himself wholly to each of the elect in accordance with the degree and extent of his merits. Thus the totality of angels and men will be associated in perfect unity, by virtue of Him Who is called the first-born of creation, the head of the body of the Church, Who has received the primacy of all things,[166] so that God may be all in all: Ut sit Deus omnia in omnibus.[167]

Such are the sentiments and teaching of the Faith and the Sacred Books; but, from the same texts which we have quoted, sacred theology infers and sets out prominently applications which are equally certain, and points of view that are just as illuminating.

Theology starts from the principle that, after the resurrection, the elements and material nature will be adapted to the circumstances of the glorious bodies; consequently, we need only recall what we are taught about the state of the glorious bodies for our minds to be able to open upon new horizons, and form a clearer and more precise idea of this palace of the renewed creation, destined one day to be our domain and dwelling place.

The first prerogative which the resurrected bodies of the elect will enjoy will be that of subtility. Just as the risen Lord passed through a tomb which was sealed, and, the following day, appeared suddenly before His disciples in a room the doors of which were closed, so our bodies, when they are no longer composed of an inert and gross substance but are vivified and penetrated at every point by the spirit, corpus spirituale, will pass through space like a ray of sunshine, and no corporeal object will have the capacity to hold them back.

The second property of the glorious bodies will be agility. They will run like sparks across reeds, tamquam scintillae in arundineto discurrent.[168] They will have the ability to move with the swiftness of thought itself, and, wherever the mind wishes, the body will convey itself immediately.

Thus, our bodies will no longer be bound to the earth by the force of attraction but, freed from all corruption and all gravity, they will spring up according to their desire; and, just as the Lord was taken up to Heaven, so shall we be raised up to meet Him in the air, and we, too, will fly, seated upon clouds.

Even now, the present physical order offers us an image and a faint reflection of this new state to which our nature will one day be raised. Do not imponderable elements, such as electricity and magnetism freely pass

[165] St. Augustine: City of God, last book, last chapter.

[166] Consummans in unum per eum qui est primogenitus omnis creaturae, caput corporis Ecclesiae, in omnibus primatum tenens. (Colossians 1:18)

[167] 1 Corinthians 15:28

[168] Wisdom 3:7.

through the densest and most opaque substances, and do they not move rapidly and effortlessly through granite and metals? It will be likewise with our bodies after the resurrection. Matter will no longer be able to stop or circumscribe them. Baseness will be absorbed in glory, the tangible in the spiritual, the human in the divine.

There will be no more disease, no more death, and therefore no nourishment, no procreation and no differentiation of sex. Our flesh, at present weak and subject to a thousand ailments, will become impassible, endowed with a strength, solidity and consistency which will free it forever from all change, weariness and alteration.

Lastly, the resurrected elect will possess brightness. They will be encompassed with such splendour that they will appear like so many suns: Tunc justi fulgebunt sicut sol in regno Patris eorum.[169] In fact, this brightness will be distributed in different degrees among the elect, according to the inequality of their merits; for the brightness of the sun is one thing, that of the moon is another and that of the stars yet another. The stars themselves differ from one another in brightness. So shall it be at the resurrection of the dead.[170]

The elect who appear surrounded with most glory will be the doctors: "But they that are learned shall shine as the brightness of the firmament: and they that instruct many to justice, as stars for all eternity."[171] The brightness with which the elect will be adorned will unceasingly cast out new reflections, increasing every moment: the glorified saints will eternally communicate to each other the goods they possess, and they will reflect upon one another the streams of splendour which illuminate them. The source and centre of this divine brightness will be none other than God Himself Who, in the words of St. John, is all "light" and in whom there is no admixture of imperfection and darkness: Cum apparuerit, similes ei erimus, quoniam videbimus eum sicuti est.[172]

The vision of God, which the elect will contemplate face to face, in its essence, will inundate their souls with its most ineffable irradiations, and their souls, in turn, will illuminate their bodies, which will appear surrounded with as much brightness as created nature can contain.

From this entire doctrine, we may draw the certain conclusion that our bodies will enter a mode of existence utterly different from their way of life on earth, that they will be ennobled, embellished and transfigured to such an extent that, between this new state and the present one, there will be an infinitely greater difference

[169] Matthew 13:43.

[170] Ephesians 15:41,42.

[171] Qui autem docti fuerint fulgebunt quasi spendor firmamenti. Et qui ad justitiam erudiunt multos, quasi stellae in perpetuas aeternitates. (Daniel 12:3)

[172] 1 John 1:5.

than between an inert rock and the most brilliant sunbeams, or between the purest gold and the foulest, murkiest slime.

Furthermore, it is written that the bodies of the saints will be modelled and formed after the risen body of Christ: Configurati corpori claritatis Christi - made like to the body of the glory of Christ.[173] Jesus Christ in the Eucharist gives us an image and likeness of what the glorious bodies will be like one day. Without leaving Heaven, where He is seated at the right hand of His Father, He is substantially present every day on earth, in a thousand places. He is entire, without réduction or diminution, in each particle of the Host and in each drop of the Chalice. By this supernatural and incomprehensible mode of existence, does He not show that those who have launched into the new life are no longer bound or governed by the laws of the present physical nature, and that inert matter can place no obstacle against the goodness and infinite power of God?

As we look over the lives of the saints, we again find innumerable analogies of that state to which we shall be raised in the life to come.

As soon as a soul has soared towards God and the spirit from above has come down into it, raising it beyond the tyranny of the senses and the bondage of the lower appetites, it happens that the flesh experiences the after-effects of the new life with which the soul is endowed, and often feels the anticipated effects of that glorious freedom which the children of God will enter. Saints like Teresa and a multitude of ecstatic souls, interiorly consumed by the fire of the Seraphim, have risen up of themselves, unsupported, into the air. St. Maur, the disciple of St. Benedict, used to walk dry-shod over the water. Others, such as St. Francis Xavier and St. Alphonsus Liguori, were released from the laws of space and were seen simultaneously preaching, praying in a town, attending a sick person or going to the aid of shipwrecked men in the most distant places.

On other occasions, the light which the spirit of God has poured into the souls of the saints becomes visible on their features, their clothing and their whole person, illuminating them with a halo, by which they appear gloriously surrounded. So it should be; for those who sow in the flesh reap corruption, and those who sow in the spirit reap life everlasting.[174]

There is yet another certain truth which is of faith, and it is that once the judgement has been completed Jesus Christ will immediately ascend back to Heaven, with all His elect as escort. He will point out to each of them the place which He prepared for him on the day of His Ascension: Vado parare vobis locum - I go to prepare a place for you. (John 14:2)

[173] Philippians 3:20.

[174] Galatians 6:8

For a dwelling-place, the elect will have the empyrean heaven, the one which is above all the heavenly bodies and all corporeal, visible nature. As it is written: "Then we who are alive...shall be taken up together with them in the clouds to meet Christ in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord."[175]

Does it follow that the rest of creation, the heavenly bodies and our sublunary world will remain empty and depopulated? If this were so, why would divine wisdom rebuild them on a new plan, and adorn them with all the marvels of His splendour and beauty? St. Thomas teaches us that Heaven is destined to serve as the abode and principal habitation of the glorified saints, but they will not on that account be motionless, and restricted within a fixed place. Each of the elect will have his throne, and they will occupy higher abodes and places, according to their merit, but, observes St. Thomas, the word place, locum, is to be understood rather as excellence of rank, order of primacy, than as the eminence of the place which will be assigned. If Christ were momentarily to leave Heaven, the place where He went to reside would always be the worthiest and highest, and the other places the more honourable as they were closer to the one occupied by Christ; and do not the angels, who enjoy glory, descend from Heaven and return there at their pleasure? It must be concluded that the temple of immensity will blossom forth in its totality and in all its brilliance before the ecstatic gaze of the elect, and that, without leaving Christ for a single moment, they will have the power to transport themselves, in the twinkling of an eye, to the ends of the firmament. They will be free to explore the heavenly bodies, reappear on this earth, pass again over the places where they lived and prayed, places which were the scene of their labours and immolation. This view concurs with the texts of the Sacred Books, where they tell us that there are many mansions in our heavenly Father's house,[176] that the saints will shine like stars in perpetual eternities and that, wherever the body, that is, the sacred humanity of Christ, shall be, there also will the eagles be gathered.[177]

Here, science is in accord with faith, and helps us to form an idea of the order, extent and magnificence of this temple, which will serve as an abode for renewed man.

In our times, the fertile, enterprising genius of man, having explored the earth over its surface and in its innermost recesses, has launched out up to the heavenly bodies, and boldly sent his voice into the heavens: In coelo posuit os suum - They have set their mouth against Heaven.[178] Armed with the most powerful instruments which human art has ever been able to construct, contemporary astronomy has, over a wide area, rent the veil of the immense expanse which had seemed impenetrable to man's understanding and by patient study and analysis has marked

[175] Simul rapiemur cum illis in nubibus Christo in aera, et sic semper cum Domino erimus. (1 Thessalonians 4:16)

[176] John 14:2.

[177] Luke 17:37

[178] Psalm 72:9.

out the shores of the starry sky, and investigated all their depths and secrets.

Now, it has been found at the present time that this earth which we inhabit is only a minute atom in comparison with the thousands of millions of worlds which fill the void of the firmament. I am not speaking solely of our planetary system. Everyone knows that the sun, which is its centre and which invigorates us by its heat at the same time as it gives us light with its rays, is separated from us by a distance of ninety-three million miles, and that its light, which covers one hundred and eighty-six thousand miles a second, takes more than twenty minutes to reach our eyelids.[179]

It is not only our earth which gravitates around the sun, but a large number of other vaster and more voluminous bodies, which describe orbits around this same centre, wider than the one described in its path by the earth, in its annual journey. All these bodies, the map of which present-day science has drawn and the whole geography of which it has succeeded in elaborating with precision, are themselves mere grains of dust, insignificant specks, by comparison with this multitude of other worlds, scattered about in the immensity.[180] These innumerable stars which appear motionless and because of their incalculable distance from our earth seem to us like specks of light sown above our heads are themselves as many suns. These suns, in turn, illuminate and move planets and satellites,

[179] At the passage of Venus across the sun, observed in 1769, different astronomers worked out the sun's parallax as 8.91; a parallax of 8.91 is the equivalent of a distance from earth to sun of 23,150 terrestrial semi-diameters or 88,800,000 miles; as light travels at 186,000 miles per second, the light of the sun takes 8 minutes 13 seconds to reach us.

[180] Giving stars of the first magnitude the parallax of 0/1, we have a space of 32 years for the passage of their light. For stars of the ninth magnitude, light would reach us in 1,024 years; as for those of the sixteenth magnitude, the furthest ones visible with Herschel's telescope, they would need 24,192 years to send their light to us. Thus, all the stars could vanish and we would continue to see almost all of them for several generations. (Secchi: Des Etoiles volume 2, p.145)

and they carry along with them worlds, probably brighter, and certainly more extensive, than our solar world.[181]

If we wish to compute the number of these worlds which adorn the immensity of space - their totality forms what is called the world of constellations - we must remember that the naked eye can detect nearly six thousand eight hundred of them. Moreover, as more perfect optical instruments come to be built, their number increases in stupendous proportions. Herschel has estimated that, with the aid of a telescope, more than twenty million could be discerned. On clear nights an observer who watches the firmament perceives a hazy band of whiteness which surrounds the whole sky. By resolving the light, it was discovered that it is formed of an incalculable number of stars which, at the distance they lie from the earth, seem to merge and blend into a single, continuous, luminous path. And by analysing their light, it was possible to learn the structure of these globes, the matter of which their atmospheric mass was composed. It was established that these fixed stars were incandescent, composed of the same elements as, and having temperatures as high as, those

[181] It is evident that, at the stupendous distance which the stars are from us (a star with a parallax of a whole second is 200,000 times more distant from us than the sun), we cannot distinguish the planets which surround them; but certain phenomena permit the certain induction that these stars have obscure satellites which execute their revolutions around them. Fr. Secchi ascertained that there were stars of variable size - for instance, Algo, also known as Beta-Persei. This star of the second magnitude is at its brightest for a period of 2 days 13 hours; it then begins slowly to diminish; after 3 hours 30 minutes, it is reduced to its minimum brightness which is scarcely equal to that of a star of the fourth magnitude. The total period of variation lasts 2 days 20 hours 48 minutes and 55 seconds. Careful observations have established that this phenomenon was dependent on a dark body which partially hid the star for a certain time producing a true partial eclipse. (Secchi, vol.1, p.152)

[Note by the publishers of the English edition. Most of this footnote is based on unproved assumptions of modern science that Fr. Arminjon has accepted without asking questions which should have been asked. It is, for instance, quite impossible to establish that one star is 200,000 times more distant from us than the sun, or that the stars are "surrounded by planets," or even that all the stars (as opposed to the planets) are not equidistant from the earth. This is shown in a paper, published by Britons Catholic Library, called <u>Sir Isaac Newton and Modern Astronomy</u> by N.M. Gwynne.]

of the sun which shines upon us.[182] As for the planets, it is known that, like the earth, they have water, air and vapours...and the nature of their climates has been successfully and precisely elaborated. There is no doubt but that they are, like our sphere, dotted with continents and seas, that they have no plains and that their mountains are capped in winter with snow, which they lose in spring.[183]

[182] Through spectral studies, and by resolving light with optical instruments, it has been possible to discover the chemical nature of the incandescent substances of which the stars are formed. The presence of hydrogen, sodium and iron in abundance has been established. The spectrum of the stars presents approximately the same metallic, luminous streaks as the sun, proof that the composition of the sun and the fixed stars is identical. The stars are, like the sun, incandescent, luminous bodies in themselves. In several stars, as in Sirius, broad, dilated streaks have been observed, which is a sign of a very high temperature, and of the existence of density in the hydrogenous atmosphere of these bodies. (Secchi: Des Etoiles, 1,2,3).

[Note by the publishers of the English edition. Fr. Arminjon is quoting more unproved assumptions. For instance, the assertion that it is possible to learn the structure of stars and the matters of which their atmospheric mass is composed is without foundation. All that is possible is to make a guess of which the validity cannot be checked. The presence of hydrogen, sodium and iron in the stars is also purely a guess, and many other hypotheses could equally explain the same observations. (See again the work cited in the English publishers' note in the previous footnote.)]

[183] At the present time, when optical instruments of extraordinary power have been successfully built, and when the meteorological nature and the chemical structure of stars and planets have been established, the question of their inhabitants is stirring opinion, and science has not been able to avoid seeking the solution, as far as this is possible. On the subject of the inhabitants of the stellar worlds, an unbelieving author, M. Flammarion, has written a book, devoid of any scientific value, which is simply a work of imagination and fantasy, a mere novel. The Roman review Civilta Cattolica has published a number of serious articles on this interesting subject, of which we shall give only a few extracts. In its study of the planet Jupiter, it shows, by irrefutable evidence, that this planet could not be inhabited or, at the very least, cannot be except by creatures wholly different in structure from us. For, on the one hand, the gravity of Jupiter is only one fifth of the earth's; on the other hand, its volume is equal to that of 310 terrestrial globes; from which it follows that, compared with this planet, our earth stands in the proportion of a lentil grain to an orange. A traveller who ventured on Jupiter would weigh twice as much again as on earth: a man weighing ten stones would acquire a weight of forty-five stones, just about that of the chairman of the well-known stout men's society, founded some time ago in the United States. Like the earth and all the other planets, Jupiter performs a rotatory movement on its axis, and there is a motion of translation around the sun. It turns on its axis in ten hours which is the length of its days. The planet has a night of five hours, and is lit by the sun for only five hours. By contrast,

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How many other mysteries there are in the immensity of space, which our feeble minds will never succeed in penetrating! Thus it is that science, as it advances,

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the years are much longer than ours. It takes Jupiter eleven years, ten months and seventeen days of our terrestrial days to complete its revolution around the sun. Thus, a person who lived for twenty years on that planet, would have lived twenty-five times longer than one who had lived on earth for the same period of time. Everyone knows that the earth's axis of rotation has an inclination of about 23 degrees in its annual orbit. From this inclination, it follows that the two northern and southern hemispheres are each, successively, exposed to the direct action of the solar rays: hence the difference in temperature, and in the order and variety of the seasons. In Jupiter, the axis of rotation has an inclination of only three degrees, an insignificant quantity; thus it happens that the seasons are uniform, the temperature is even, and the two poles of the planet are immersed in perpetual darkness. We may add that, seen from the distance of Jupiter, the sun would appear as a disc having only one fifth the area which it is perceived to have by the inhabitants of the earth. The light and heat which Jupiter receives are only one twenty-seventh of the amount received by the earth. The temperature of its equator is, therefore, probably that of our North Pole. Jupiter is, in addition, surrounded by a vast quantity of vapour, and its atmosphere is furrowed with black streaks so dense that it would be impossible for an observer transported to that planet to enjoy the sight of the starry sky, or even to manage to make out the four moons or satellites which surround Jupiter. It follows that the atmospheric conditions on Jupiter do not support a plant and animal life comparable to that which exists on our earth, and that, if there are people, their physiological constitution has no analogy or likeness with ours.

If, after Jupiter, we study Saturn - a planet 3500 million miles from the earth, and separated by a space of 1,530 million miles from Jupiter - we reach this same conclusion, that Saturn cannot be inhabited by people with the same constitution as we have. The volume of Saturn is equal to 675 times that of the earth, and its density is only about twenty times greater. Saturn completes its revolution around the sun in 29 years, 166 days and 97 minutes. Consequently, its winters and summers are seven continuous years long; its poles are submerged for fourteen years in profound darkness. Our tropical regions on earth have an average temperature of 77° Fahrenheit, on Saturn it would be 0.77° Fahrenheit. Thus our pole, with its forty degrees of frost, would be a Sicily, or even a Sahara, in comparison with the temperate climates of Saturn. Again, let us add that it seems to be established that Saturn, with its ring and its seven satellites, is formed of a gaseous substance. Thus the inhabitants of this <u>pleasant</u> planet receive only one hundredth part of the light and heat which the sun sends to the earth. It follows that in order to see with any degree of clarity at all they would need to have eyes constructed like those of the owl. They would have, in addition, the pleasure of living as if they were in the gaseous state, floating through space like tufts of wool or vapour bubbles.

One planet would seem to approximate to the atmospheric conditions of our own: Mars. Of all the planets, Mars is the one which has been the most carefully studied because of its relative proximity to the earth, being at a distance of only
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reveals to us ever more the divine greatness, and bids us exclaim, with the unbounded joy of the Prophet: "The

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36 million miles. It has been possible to draw a map of it, and trace the shape of its continents and seas. Mars performs its revolution in one year and 331 days: its volume is a seventh of the earth's, and nearly five times that of the moon. The days are of 24 hours and 77 minutes, nearly the same length as ours. The light of the sun provides sufficient illumination, and its temperature is little different from ours. The continents appear in a red hue; the colouring is caused either by the atmosphere or by the colour of its soil or plants. The seas are a greenish colour, and at the pole there are white spots which lengthen or shorten according to the season, which suggests that they are snow. Now, as the years on this planet are approximately twice as long as ours, its winters extend in the same proportion; and since, taking the distance from the earth to the sun as our unit, the distance of Mars from this same body is 1.52, it follows that Mars has only a quarter of the amount of light and heat which the earth receives. So it is a sheer fantasy to portray Mars as an oasis set in space, a spring-like abode with a dazzling, blue sky, such as that of Sicily or Madeira.

Let us say a word about Venus, the most radiant and the one most lauded by the poets, called Lucifer, on account of its brilliance: the Phoenicians, Romans and Greeks placed it in the rank of divinities, calling it Juno, Isis, Venus. It is designated by the name morning star. Sometimes it precedes sunrise, often by four hours, and appears bathed in the half-light of dawn. Sometimes it precedes sunset, disappears amidst its fire and becomes invisible to us. At other times, it follows the sun when it sinks from the west, shines again and is called the evening star. In order to refute Fammarion, who boasts of the delights enjoyed by the inhabitants of Venus beneath its charming and ever-beaming sky, it will suffice to establish the facts. The diameter of Venus is inferior to the earth's by only a tenth. Its volume and density are almost the same: its days, too, are almost the same length - 23 hours, 27 minutes and 6 seconds. Yet Venus's year is only 230 days and the seasons are only of 57 days, instead of 90 days as with ours.

It might, perhaps, be inferred from all these considerations that the climate of Venus is as good as ours. But there is another side to the coin: the axis of the terrestrial orbit, as we know, is inclined about 23° on that of the equator. If the axis of the equator were parallel to that of the ecliptic, the seasons and climates would be equal all over the earth. In Venus, instead of an inclination of 23°, the orbital axis has an inclination of 50°. If the earth's axis were inclined in this proportion, all the earth's climates would be upset. France and Germany would have a tropical temperature during the summer, and a cold more intense than that of the pole in winter, and, because each season on Venus lasts only 57 days, it would be impossible for plants such as ours to grow and ripen; nor would animals, such as those on our earth, be able to subsist in such a rapid transition from torrid heat to the extremes of cold.

We may add that studies of the phenomena of refraction have established that Venus has an atmosphere twice as dense as the earth's. This does not deter the novelists of the celestial worlds from concluding that the inhabitants of these planets, having, like us, poetical talents and fine sensitivities to satisfy, are the happiest of mortals; that they live in ever-peaceful, enchanting regions...and since in those vapour baths they cannot be subject to any boredom or sorrow, perhaps it is not so incredible that they never feel any desire to see the sun shine above them during the day, or to see the stars twinkle during the night.

heavens shew forth the glory of God: and the firmament declareth the work of his hands. Day to day uttereth speech: and night to night showeth knowledge."[184] There lies man's domain, the magnificent temple destined, one day, to be his palace and habitation; once resurrected, glorious and incorruptible, he will embrace with a single glance the riches which fill these spaces, and he will cover these vast distances at one stretch, with greater swiftness than light itself travels over them.

That science which is hostile to our beliefs has sought to turn these considerations to account in order to degrade man and combat his hopes and his glorious destiny.

How can we admit, it says, that those vast spheres, inundated with light, where the elements possess all their energy and vitality, are black wildernesses, devoid of inhabitants? While our planet which, compared with other globes, is but an imperceptible speck, is supposed to serve as an abode for living creatures, capable of knowing and loving, those thousands of millions of worlds suspended above our heads are said to be composed of nothing but inert bodies, mechanically performing the law of their nature, or else of animals, slaves of their instincts and incapable of knowing the hand which feeds them? With the aid of a telescope, we can discern millions of minute animals, in a drop of water hanging from a needle; every grain of dust which we trample underfoot contains perhaps as many living, organized creatures as there are over the whole surface of the earth, and we are to believe that the Creator, so prodigal with animal life, was parsimonious with intelligent life? Could these countless worlds, intended to proclaim His glory, be merely lyres suspended in the void, without a spirit capable of hearing them, and without a heart to echo them and quiver in harmony with their songs?

If, then, reason and every analogy with existing things bid us conclude that life and thought actuate all these spheres, what is man amidst all these countless beings, these races endowed like him with a soul and a body, to enumerate which defies all our calculations and suppositions? And how can it be granted that he is the centre of all things, that it was for him that everything was made and that the final destiny of this multitude of creatures, probably superior in nature to himself, should be subordinated to the trials and vicissitudes of the ephemeral pilgrimage, which he undergoes on this earth?

To this difficulty I answer that, on this question, the Church has defined nothing. The sacred books were not written to give a sop to our curiosity. In the account which they give us of creation, they speak of only two kinds of intelligent natures: the angels and men. They were not in the least concerned to inform us what might be the mineralogical structure, and the qualities of the plants and animals, in the spheres other than those which we inhabit. In this matter, the Church has not condemned any system, and the field remains open to all hypotheses and all opinions.

[184] Psalm 18: 1,2,3.

There was a fairly general belief among the doctors of old that superior intellects were assigned to govern the celestial bodies. It is reasonable to think that beings capable of praising and blessing God fill all space, as they fill all time; thus there is no infidelity to Catholic tradition in linking the material existence of the stars to the existence of free, intelligent beings like ourselves.*

The Church even gives us to understand that they were the scene of the first act in the providential drama of that great struggle among the higher spirits which St. John describes in his Apocalypse, a struggle of which our earthly strife is the continuation.[185] It was in the most luminous part of Heaven, above the most brilliant stars, says Isaias, that Lucifer tried to set up a throne for himself, from which he was cast down; it was to the summit of this heaven of heavens, says the Ps.lmist, that Jesus Christ ascended.[186]

However, if these views are only theological opinions, what must be held as certain and as an article of faith is that all the stars and suns were reborn in the divine blood, and have shared in the grace of the Redemption. The Church affirms it in one of her solemn hymns: Terra, pontus, astra hoc lavantur flumine.

The sceptre of Heaven and earth was placed from the beginning in the hands of the Son of God. This multitude of worlds, the number as well as the dimensions of which surpass all calculation, are only the tiniest part of the dowry bestowed upon His humanity by virtue of its indissoluble union with the divinity: "Above all principality and power and virtue and dominion and every name that

* Note by the publishers of the English edition. This and the preceding three paragraphs are somewhat obscure, but it seems that Fr. Arminjon is prepared to admit, at least as a permissible hypothesis, that there may be universes other than ours and rational creatures besides men and angels. It is true that the Church has not defined on these points, but Catholics are not, in fact, free to accept such hypotheses. That there is only one world or universe is taught by St. Thomas in Summa Theologica, I, Q.47, A.3 "Whether there is only one world?"

St. Thomas proves his case from Scripture and from the principle of the order of creation, according to which all creatures are ordered to one another and to God. By the same principle, the existence of rational creatures other than men and angels would be out of harmony with the order of creation.

Moreover, the existence of bodily rational creatures other than man would contradict the Genesis account in which God's creation of all bodily things is assigned to the first six days, (cf. Genesis 1:31) and it is stated that creation thereupon ended. And since an incorporeal rational creature would by definition be an angel it follows that the existence of no rational creature other than men and angels is compatible with reason and revelation.

[185] Isaias 14:12,13; Apocalypse 13:7.

[186] Ramiere: Horizon des serviteurs du Coeur de Jesus (Messager du Sacre-Coeur, April 1879, p.384)

is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come. And he hath subjected all things under his feet and hath made him head over all the Church..."[187]

If you ask me why, among the spheres incomparably more vast and brilliant, the Creator sought out the smallest of the inhabited stars, to make it the place of His annihilation, the scene of His labours and of the mysteries of His Incarnation and of our Redemption, I shall reply that the uncreated Word, desiring to show the depths and the excess of His love by abasing Himself to the very extreme, surged out from the bosom of His Father and from the eternal hills, as Scripture says, and, without stopping, passed through all the orders of intellectual hierarchy.

Crossing the empyrean heaven, where the angelic natures live, He did not unite Himself to them, and it was not in their abode that He established His dwelling-place: Nusquam enim angelos apprehendit - For nowhere doth he take hold of the angels.[188] Descending next into the highest regions of the firmament, those lit by the great suns, He deemed them, also, too sumptuous and brilliant. As it is written in the Canticle of Canticles, "He cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping over the hills" until He came to the meanest thing there was: Ecce venit saliens in montibus.[189] To plant His mortal footsteps, to hide Himself and to suffer, He chose, among all the stars of creation, one of the smallest and most obscure, confirming, in regard to the worlds, as to individuals, these words of the Prophet (Psalm 112, verse 7): "Raising up the needy from the earth: and lifting up the poor out of the dunghill."

No doubt, from the preference Christ gave to our inferior and limited planet, and from the perpetual transubstantiation of its material substance into the body of God, which is consummated in the Eucharist, our earth has not acquired that pre-eminence in the physical order which the ancients mistakenly ascribed to it. It is the centre of the supernatural world. It is the source, says the Apostle, from which spreads over all the other worlds the virtue which conserves and deifies them; it gathers within its unity all the perfections which compose the universe; it restores within its totality the diversity of created existences; through it the heavens bowed down, God approached this base world, and, to use the beautiful expression of St. Ambrose, He clothed Himself in the universe as in a mantle, and became resplendent among all the creatures.

That is all we can say about the future state of the worlds and the place of immortality.

Of course we do not intend today to describe the supreme, essential happiness of the elect, which we call the <u>beatific vision</u> - that possession of God, so intimate and inherent in our being, that we shall be united to it just as iron unites with fire and, seeing it face to face, at the source of the rays of its eternal essence, we shall be transformed in the resemblance of its divine splendours: that vision, called <u>eternal life</u> because it confers upon man a direct and immediate sharing in the bliss of God, is not dependent on any space or place. God is infinite and everywhere present. The just soul is the sanctuary wherein it most pleases Him to dwell. The angels who assist and

[187] Ephesians 1:21.

[188] Hebrews 2:16.

[189] Canticle of Canticles 2:8.

protect us on this earth, see the face of the Heavenly Father unceasingly, and the souls of the blessed separated from their bodies have their paradise wherever they are placed. Were they amidst the deepest darkness of the abyss, God, who possesses and completely satisfies them, would not fail to inundate them with His brightness, and the joys in which He immerses them would not suffer any diminution. If man were a pure spirit, he would not need any definite, material place beyond the present life. Earth and creation would then no longer have any purpose, and would be irrevocably destroyed; but mankind is destined to be reborn, whence it follows that the matter which served as its garment is also meant to be restored, in the same way as its rejuvenated, glorified host.

Thus mankind as a complete body, and the whole of visible creation, will be tried by fire, and they will come out of it, dazzling and purified. Just as a metal is not cast into the furnace to be consumed and destroyed but to come out refined and in the state of pure gold, so the conflagration which the world will undergo will not annihilate it, but only purify and transform it into a clearer and purer image of the idea of God realized in it.

"And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

"And I heard a great voice from the throne, saying: Behold the tabernacle of God with men, and he will dwell with them. And they will be his people; and God himself with them shall be their God."[190]

Oh, you must not think that, because the world will cease to turn round upon itself and ever to revolve around the same circle like a slave tied to the millstone that, in this new earth, there will be no freshness in the air, no verdure in the meadows, no flowers on the trees and no water gushing out of the springs. You imagine, perhaps, that this nature, which now runs, moves and seethes, full of zest and life, beneath the indirect and partial light of our dark sun, is to remain inert, fruitless and frozen beneath the direct gaze of God! Far from it: the new world is a living thing! The heavenly Jerusalem is the eternal Church, the daughter of God, the spotless spouse of the Lamb. The Lamb, the incarnate Word, occupies the centre of its heart. It is He who is its life, its focus, its streaming water and its ever burning, inextinguishable torch. As for the fortunate creatures who dwell in it, they will for ever pass rapidly from brightness to brightness, from progress to progress, from one ecstasy to another. "God cannot grow, but the creature will always grow. Only, it will bind itself unalterably to its centre through an immense love, and this is what will be known as its repose and immobility."[191]

What practical and moral lessons are to be drawn from these teachings, for the guidance of our lives and the rule of our actions?

The first is this: that it is the height of human folly to become attached to the perishable and corruptible goods of this life.

[190] Apocalypse 21:2.

[191] Gratry: De la Connaissance de l'Ame, vol.1, ch.2, 6.

What would you think of a great king, lord of a vast empire, who, spurning his sumptuous treasures and the glitter of his crown, kept his eyes and all his thoughts fixed on a handful of sand or a piece of slime, and set his heart and all his affections unwaveringly on this base matter? The story is told of a Roman emperer who, instead of commanding his armies and dispensing justice, spent his time killing flies. So it is with the majority of men called to possess a kingdom which encompasses the whole range of the firmaments: they excite themselves and engage in senseless fights to the death over objects more trifling than the flimsy web spun by the spider, than shrivelled grass or than the paltry, worthless life of the worm, crawling along at our feet.

The second of these consequences is that suffering in this life is only a relative evil. There are on this earth cases of profound sorrow, of intolerable, raw bruises and heart-rending, indescribable separations. History affords us the spectacle of mothers who with their own eyes saw their children branded, degraded, and delivered to wretches worse than demons, who tortured their bodies, and strove, by countless contrivances, to kill their souls. It has portrayed the spiritual anguish, worse than torture and death, which they endured. A great poet has said: "He who lives in a hovel, and he who lives in a palace - all in this life suffer and mourn; queens have been seen weeping like ordinary women, and the quantity of tears in the eyes of kings has brought astonishment."[192]

Yet all this heart-break and suffering are but a laboratory and a crucible, into which divine goodness has cast our nature, in order that, like coal, black and base, it may emerge in the form of a precious, sparkling diamond.

Jesus Christ has said: "A woman, when she is in labour, hath sorrow, because Her hour is come, but, when she hath brought forth the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world. So also you now indeed have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart shall rejoice. And your joy no man shall take from you."[193]

Thus it is with every part of creation. It is in pain, it sows the harvest to come amidst tribulation and tears, but, sooner or later, there will rise over it the sun of that other world, the dawn of which we can glimpse by faith, and all that now lies buried and overwhelmed beneath the weight of sin and death, all that sighs in pain amidst malediction and corruption, will be filled with light and joy, and will rise up again in the glory of a boundless, endless bliss.

The third consequence of our doctrine is that we must not allow ourselves to be perturbed by the noise of our social strife and the convulsions of our revolutions. All this is but a prelude. It is the chaos which precedes harmony; it is motion seeking rest, twilight on the move towards day. The city of God is being built, invisibly but surely, amidst these shocks and heart-breaking convulsions. Public disasters and great scourges are none other than the sword of the Lord and the harbinger of His justice, separating the chaff from the good seed. Our

[192] Chateaubrand: <u>Genie du Christianisme</u>.

[193] John 16:21,22.

wars, moral combats and civil commotions hasten the day of deliverance, when the city of God will be perfect and complete; and, when the turmoil of the ages has passed, there will come a great calm and a great pacification. Then there will follow progress and growth, the eternal dwelling-place of free, intelligent creatures, the unity which will make all people a single soul in the life and eternal light of God.

St. Augustine, after his baptism, having considered in what place he might serve God most usefully, determined to return to Africa with his mother, his brother and a youth named Evodius.

When they reached Ostia, they stopped there to rest after the long journey they had undertaken from Milan, and were preparing to embark.

One evening, Augustine and his mother, leaning upon a window which looked on to the garden of the house, were conversing most graciously, forgetting the whole past and directing their gaze upon the heavenly future.

That evening the night was calm, the sky clear, the air still, and in the light of the moon and the gentle twinkling of the stars the sea could be seen, extending the silvery azure of its waves to the distant horizon.

Augustine and Monica were seeking to discover what eternal life would be like. In a single movement of the mind they scaled the stars, the sky and every region where bodies lived. Next, they swept past above the angels and spiritual creatures, felt themselves transported to the very throne of eternal Wisdom, and had, as it were, a vision of Him through whom all things exist and who is Himself always, without any distinction of time.

How long did their ecstasy last? To them it seemed as fleeting as a flash, and they felt unable to estimate its duration.

Having recovered consciousness, and being obliged once more to hear the noise of human voices, Monica exclaimed: For my part, I find no more pleasure in this life, and I do not know what I am doing or why I still remain here." That scene has remained famous and popular. Great masters have immortalized it in the masterpieces of their art. The paintings and images which they have drawn of it have been reproduced a thousand times, and have left, vivid and imperishable, this sublime episode in the life of Monica and Augustine.

On the following day, Monica caught an illness which led to her death, and nine days after the ecstasy which had entranced and raised her above the senses, she went to contemplate face to face that sovereign beauty, whose radiance and image she had glimpsed on earth.[194]

In that abode of blissful life which Saint Monica glimpsed, Christ will be truly king; not only as God, but, inasmuch as He is visible and clothed with our human nature, He will reign in the house of Jacob for ever.[195]

[194] Confessions of St. Augustine, bk.IX, X.

[195] Et regnabit in domo Jacob in aeternum et regni ejus non erit finis. (Luke 1:32,33)

His accession to His kingdom will not be definitive, and the glory with which He is invested at the right hand of His Father will not be perfect and consummated, until He has finished laying His enemies at His feet.[196]

Then, all things will be subjected to Him, and He Himself will be subjected to the One who has bound every creature to Himself. Hitherto, Christ fought in union with His Church, and was busy conquering His kingdom, whether by eliminating the wicked from it, or by calling to Himself the just through the ineffable attraction of His mercy. His kingdom in Heaven will be built on a completely new foundation, and on a model very different from the one on which it is established here below.[197] In that new life Jesus Christ will no longer be represented by a teaching Church, and the elect will not need to be enlightened and aided by the good angels, nor to have recourse to the sacraments for their sanctification. Their state will be a pure, perpetual contemplation of the divinity, in which Christ, the head of humanity, will bear within Himself, to the bosom of His Father, the totality of its members, in order to subject them to Him, to Whom He is Himself subject. Et tunc Filius erit subjectus Patri, ut sit Deus omnia in omnibus - Then the Son shall be subject unto the Father, that God may be all in all. (Corinthians 15:28)

There will be no domination but that of one God, extending to all men, and there will be but one glory, the glory of God, become the possession of all. Just as the present life is subjected to various constraints and requires for its support certain kinds and conditions of air, clothing and food, so, as St. Gregory Nazianzen says, in the kingdom of Christ the divine vision will compensate for these different needs. The elect will find therein all that they are capable of loving and desiring; it will be their clothing, their food and drink, and will satisfy all the demands of their renewed life.[198]

[196] Dixit Dominus Domino meo: Sede a dextris meis, donec ponam inimicos tuos scabellum pedum tuorum. (Psalm 109:1)

[197] Tunc enim cessabunt omnia ministeria, novae illuminationes in beatis, accidentalia gaudia de conversione peccatorum et similia, sed erit quasi pura quaedam contemplatio divina eodem modo stabilis ac perpetua, qua totus Christus, id est, caput cum omnibus membris feretur in Deum eique subjiciatur. Et huic expositioni quadrat ratio subjuncta a Paulo: Et tunc Filius erit subjectus Patri, ut sit Deus omnia in omnibus: id est, ut unus Deus in omnibus dominetur et glorificetur, et omnes in Deo habeant quidquid sancte et juste amare possunt ac desiderare. (Suarez: Question, LIX, Article 7)

[198] Cum vita quam in praesenti transigimus, varie a nobis exigatur, multae res sunt quarum participes sumus, ut aeris, loci, cibi ac potus, et aliarum rerum ad usum vitae necessariarum, quarum nulla est Deus. Beatitudo vero quam exspectamus, nullius quidem harum rerum egena est, omnia autem nobis, locoque omnium erit Divina natura, ad omnem usum ac necessitatem illius vitae sese convenieter et apte impartiens (St. Gregory of Nyssa: Liber de Anima et Resurrectione)

Happy he who can forget the cares of the present for a moment, and turn his hopes towards this blessed abode, raising himself up in thought to these high spheres of contemplation and love.

But, O my God, how far these ideas are from the thoughts of most men, and where is he who will even lend a cursory attention to the few things we have endeavoured to stammer out? The greater number, blinded by their passions, consumed by greed and pride, are far removed from any concern for their souls and their future. Children of men, how long will your hearts be burdened, how long will you seek your sustenance in lies and shadows? When will you cease imagining death as a curse, and regarding it as the abyss of darkness and destruction? Let us try to-day to understand that it is not the obstacle, but the means; it is the paschal transition which leads from the kingdom of shadows to that of reality, from the life of movement to the life of immutability and indefectibility. It is the good sister, whose hand will one day cast off the clouds and idle phantoms, to lead us into the holy of holies of certitude and incomparable beauty.

Ah, perhaps in this discourse we have been permitted to have an inkling and a glimpse of what will take place in the land of glory. So far as forming an exact idea of it is concerned, we can no more do so than the person who, having lived since his mother's womb in an underground cave, could picture to himself the light of a beautiful day.

In drawing an image of the kingdom of Christ, we have been able to speak only in riddles and metaphors; but these riddles and metaphors represent great and true things, an eloquent, irrefutable commentary on these words of the Apostle: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love him.[199]

Here, speech fails. Beyond what we have said, reason is powerless to conceive anything. Man can only believe, hope, love and hold his peace. "And he said to me: These words are most faithful and true - Et dixit mihi: haec verba fidelissima sunt et vera."[200]

We have obeyed you, Lord God, we have spoken these things, we have written them and we have preached them. May those who have heard them, and we with them, by a holy, sinless life obtain one day their perfect fulfilment!

[199] Quod oculus non vidit, nec auris audivit, nec in cor hominis ascendit, quae praeparavit Deus iis qui diliqunt illum. (I Corinthians 2:9)

[200] Apocalypse 22:6.

FIFTH CONFERENCE

On Purgatory

Miseremini mei, miseremini mei, saltem vos amici mei, quia manus Domini tetigit me.

Have pity on me, have pity on me, at least you my friends, because the hand of the Lord hath touched me. (Job 19:21)

How beautiful religion is, how admirable and consoling in its teachings and in the glorious obscurity of its mysteries! While letting us die on earth through the deprivation of our bodies, it does not make us die in our hearts by the rupture of friendships, which are their joy and support.

Does not the merciful Saviour Who, out of a feeling of exquisite delicacy, deigned to be called the God of Abraham, Who promised His Apostles to bring them to rest one day in the bosom of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, seem to give us to understand, by this religious remembrance given to ancestors, that death does not have the privilege of breaking the lawful ties of life, and that holy affections are not extinguished by the cold hand of death?

Our task to-day is a difficult one: we must make you love and fear Purgatory. Purgatory deserves to be feared. It is, in all truth, the workshop of infinite justice. Divine stringency and rigour are there exercised with an intensity which, to us on earth, is unknown. Weighty Doctors of the Church assure us that all the cruelties practised on the martyrs by their executioners, and all the sufferings and afflictions heaped upon men since the beginning of time, cannot be compared to the lightest penalty in that place of atonement. On the other hand, purgatory is the masterpiece of the Heart of God, the most marvellous artifice of His love, so much so that we could not tell you whether the consolations enjoyed there are not more abundant than the torments themselves.

The state of the holy souls whose laments we wish to let you hear is incomprehensible and ineffable. Their bliss is not that of Heaven, where joys are unmixed; their torments are not those of Hell, where suffering is unremitting. Their pains bear no comparison with those of the present life, where happy days alternate with days of desolation and sorrow.

These souls are happy and unhappy at the same time. The most extreme tribulations, the greatest anguish which the soul can feel, are indissolubly united to the most authentic and most exhilarating joys imaginable, excepting those of Heaven.

Oh, do not accuse the Lord of cruelty towards these souls, whom He will one day immerse in the ocean of His radiance, and make them drink the torrent of His pleasure: De torrente voluptatis potabis eos - Thou shalt make them drink of the torrent of thy pleasure.[201] Rather wonder how love and justice are united by a mutual disposition in this great work of amendment and purification.

In the light of those terrible flames, we shall realize the profound degree of evil contained in the faults which we consider slight and unimportant. Moreover the consolations, which God's infinite clemency condescends to extend to these dark places of fire, will help us to calm the fears which will grip us at our last hour; at the moment of our death, they will set our souls at peace and inspire us with courage, confidence and true resignation.

So, in a few words, Purgatory is pleasing and consoling, a blessed abode, worthy of our greatest solicitude and predilection, inasmuch as the torments there endured are visited upon holy souls, beloved of God. Purgatory is a scene of affliction and anguish, inasmuch as God's justice gains compensation for the portion of sacrifice and love which we have refused Him here below.

Holy angels, guardians of those fiery chasms, help me to call to mind those souls, so holy and resigned, from the bowels of the flames that torment them. Make us recognize among them our fathers, our mothers, our sisters and brothers. Let their so tender and heart-rending cries penetrate our ears, for they would be capable of splitting the mountains and mollifying cruelty itself.

Oh, if our hearts have not been turned to stone, if one drop of Christian blood still runs in our veins, we shall understand that there is no greater distress to be relieved, no devotion more meritorious or more compelling to be practised!

I

The existence of purgatory is explicitly attested by Holy Scripture and by the constant tradition of the Jewish and Christian Church. It is said in the books of Machabees that it is a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead, so that they may be freed from the faults and imperfections by which they sullied themselves in life: ut a peccatis solvantur - that they may be loosed from sins.[202] St. Paul, speaking of easy-going and presumptuous preachers who, in the exercise of their ministry, are led astray by love of praise and yield to thoughts of vanity and feelings of self-satisfaction, says that they will be saved, but after having first been tried by fire: sic quasi per ignem - yet so as by fire.[203] St. Gregory teaches that souls guilty of trespasses for which they have

[201] Psalm 35:9.

[202] 2 Machabees 12:46.

[203] Corinthians 3:15.

not sufficiently atoned during their life, will be baptized in fire: ab igne baptizabuntur. It will be their second baptism. The first is necessary in order to introduce us into the Church on earth, the second to introduce us into the Church in Heaven. According to St. Cyril and St. Thomas, the fire of Purgatory is of the same kind as that of Hell. It has the same intensity, and differs only in that it is temporary. Lastly, the sacred liturgy teaches us that Purgatory is a frightful abyss, a place in which the souls are in anguish and cruel expectation, a brazier where they burn unceasingly, subjected to the effect of subtle fire, lit by the breath of divine justice, the strength of which is the measure of His most just and most dreadful vengeance: Dies irae, dies illa... Lacrymosa dies illa, qua resurget ex favilla judicandus homo reus.[204]

In the Canon of the Mass, the Church offers her petitions to God in order to obtain for these souls locum lucis, a place of light: whence it follows that they are in the night, and enveloped in dense, impenetrable darkness. She seeks for them locum refrigerii, a place of refreshment: whence it follows that they are in intolerable, burning pain. Again, she asks for them locum pacis, a place of peace: whence it follows that they are consumed by fears and inexpressible anxieties.

[204] According to St. Bonaventure, St. Thomas and St. Augustine, the torments of Purgatory surpass in severity all the pains which man can endure in this life.

"Et si aeternus non sit, miro tamen modo gravis est; exceditque omnes poenas quas aliquis in hac vita passus est." (St. Augustine, lib.50, homily, c.XVIII) - "Unde in Psalm 37: Domine ne in furore tuo arguas me, ait damnatos argui in furore Dei, justos vero in purgatorio corrigi in ira Dei."

St. Anselm, 1 Corinthians 3: "Sciendum est quod gravior est ille ignis quam quidquid homo pati potest in hac vita."

Caesarius, Homily 8: "Nemo hoc dicat, fratres charissimi, quia ille ipse purgatorius ignis durior erit, quam quod possit poenarum in hoc saeculo aut accidere, aut sentiri, aut cogitari."

However, St. Bonaventure (in 4.D.20, a.1, 4.2) interprets the different opinions which we have just quoted in a milder sense. The pains of Purgatory, he says, are of a supernatural order; consequently it is certain that, taken in themselves, they surpass by their intrinsic nature all the sufferings of the present life. This notwithstanding, it cannot be granted that, in the concrete case and in respect of each individual, the lightest of the pains of Purgatory exceeds all the torments that a man might endure on this earth. Thus, for example, if a soul is guilty of only a very small venial sin, there would be no proportion between the sin and the penalty if the soul were condemned, for that sole fault, to endure all the sufferings of the martyrs. The opinion of St. Bonaventure concurs with the statements of a large number of saints, who have learned by revelation that men have been condemned to Purgatory for only a very short time, and that they were spared the pain of fire. All the more reason for concluding that, among the souls in Purgatory, there are a certain number condemned only to comparatively light penalties.

This simple description makes our whole being shake with horror. Let us hasten to say that the consolations which these captive souls experience are also inexpressible.

It is true that their eyes are not yet refreshed by the sight of the gentle light, and the angels do not descend from Heaven to transform their flames into a refreshing dew; but they have the sweetest treasure, one which is enough by itself to raise up the man most despondent beneath the weight of his afflictions, and bring the dawn of calmness to the most doleful and dejected countenances: they possess the good which, on earth, remains to the most wretched and deprived of men, when he has drained the ever-filling cup of all afflictions and pains: they have hope. They possess hope in the highest order, in that degree which excludes all uncertainty and apprehension, which sets the heart at rest, in the deepest and most absolute security: Reposita est mihi corona justitiae - There is laid up for me a crown of justice.[205]

These souls are assured of their salvation. St. Thomas gives us two reasons for this unshakable certainty which is so consoling that it makes them, in a certain sense, forget their pains. In the first place, these souls know that it is of faith that the reprobate can neither love God, nor hate their sins, nor fulfil any good work: now they have an inner awareness that they love God, that they hate their faults and can no longer do evil. Moreover, they know with the certainty of faith that souls who die in a state of mortal sin are cast into Hell without delay, the very moment they utter their final sigh. Ducunt in bonis dies suos, et in puncto ad inferna descendunt - They spend their days in wealth. And in a moment they go down to hell.[206]

Now, the souls of whom I speak are not given up to despair, do not see the faces of the demons, do not hear their curses and blasphemies: from this fact, they infallibly conclude that they did not die in a state of mortal sin, but are in a state of grace and pleasing to God.

Also, what a source of happiness it is for them to be able to exclaim with St. Paul's confidence: "No more relapses into sin! no more separation between God and myself: Certus sum enim! For I am certain! no more terrifying doubts about my predestination. Ah! it is over, I am saved...I have heard from the very mouth of my God the irrevocable declaration of my salvation; I know so as never again to doubt it that one day the gates of the heavenly city will open for my triumphal entry and that Heaven, earth, the principalities and powers together are powerless to separate me from the charity of God and dispossess me of my eternal crown: 'for I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor night, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.'"[207]

[205] 2 Timothy 4:8.

[206] Job 21:13.

[207] Romans 8:38.

Oh, no doubt this soul will exclaim: how sharp my pains are! Nothing can be compared with the violence of my punishment; but this punishment and these sufferings are powerless to take me away from God, to destroy the fire of His love within me: "Who shall then separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation? or distress? or famine?..."[208] Oh! My weakness is now no longer liable to reveal itself in outbursts of temper, in impatience and murmuring. Resigned to God's will and pleasure, I bless the hand that chastises me, I accept joyfully all my torments.

These torments cannot crush my soul, nor make it uneasy, bitter or anxious... Non contristabit justum quidquid ei acciderit. I know that they are ordained and moderated by that divine Providence which, for the good of creatures, arranges all things with love and equity.[209] I will say more: I should prefer my torments to the delights of Heaven, if it could be granted to me to enjoy them against the desire of that sovereign will to which I am henceforth absolutely and irrevocably subject. My wishes and aspirations are summed up in a single motto: "All that God wishes, as He wishes it and at the time He wishes it." Oh! God of my heart, my treasure and my all, what am I that Thou deignest to come down to me and, with Thy paternal hand, purify an ungrateful and unfaithful soul!

Oh, cut deep into the flesh, drain the unimaginable cup of Thy torments! Listen only to Thy honour and the interest of Thy justice, and, until this is fully satisfied, pay no heed either to my groans or my complaints.

Poor souls! They have but one passion, one burning desire, one wish - to break the obstacle which prevents them from springing forward towards God, Who calls them and draws them to Him with all the energy and all the violence of His beauty, mercy and boundless love.

Oh, if they could, they would willingly stir up the flames which consume them, and vie with one another in accumulating torment upon torment, purgatory upon purgatory, in order to hasten the happy day of their deliverance. In these souls there are residual traces of sin, an alloy of afflictions, blemishes and defects which does not permit them to unite with the divine substance. Their imperfections, the venial faults with which they allowed themselves to be tarnished, have darkened and maimed their inner eye. If, before their complete purification, the bright, dazzling light of Heaven met their sick, enfeebled eyes, they would feel an impression a thousand times more painful and burning than those which they feel amidst the deepest darkness of the abyss. God Himself would like to transform them immediately into the likeness of His glory by illuminating them with the pure rays of His divinity;

[208] Romans 8:35.

[209] Censeo esse de fide, illas animas non ita perturbari doloribus, ut irrationalem quamquam anxietatem, vel impatientiam sustineat. Probatur ex proverbio XII: non contristabit justum quidquid ei acciderit. Quod si hoc dixit sapiens de justo in hac vita degente quando divina gratia et protectione custoditur, quid dicendum est de animabus illis, quae confirmatae sunt in gratia, et in omni bono, et certissime norunt illas poenas esse justissimas, et ex Dei ordinatione evenire? (Suarez: Disputationes, XLVII, section III, p.932)

but these rays, being too bright and dazzling, could not penetrate them. They would be intercepted by the dross and the remains of that earthly dust and mire with which they are still sullied. It is essential that, having been cast into a consuming crucible, they should lay aside the rest of human imperfections, so that, from being like base, black carbon, they may emerge in the form of a precious, transparent crystal. Their nature must be made subtle, purged of every admixture of shadow and darkness, and become capable of receiving, without opposition, the irradiations and splendours of divine glory which, flowing in superabundance within them, one day, will fill them, like a river without banks or bottom.

Imagine a person afflicted with a hideous ailment which gnaws his flesh and makes him an object of ostracism and disgust for those around him. The doctor, seeking to cure him, applies forceps and fire unsparingly. With his terrible instrument, he probes to the very marrow of the bones. He will attack the source and root of the disease in its innermost depths. So violent are the convulsions of the patient that he nearly expires; but, when the operation is over, he feels reborn, the disease has disappeared, and he has recovered his beauty, youth and vigour. Ah! Far from flying into a rage with complaints and reproaches, he has no words or blessing great enough to express his gratitude to the skilled man who, by making him suffer a thousand woes, gave him the most precious of things: health and life.

So it is with the souls in Purgatory. They quiver with joy as they see their stains and filth vanish through the marvellous effect of that reparatory punishment. Under the action of those purifying flames, their more or less disfigured being is refreshed and restored. The fire itself, St. Thomas says, loses its intensity in proportion as it consumes and destroys the faults and imperfections which feed its strength. A barrier of imperceptible size still separates these souls from the place of recompense. Oh! They feel indescribable transports of joy, as they see the wings growing which will enable them soon to rush forward towards the abodes of heaven. Already they glimpse the dawn of deliverance. Oh! they are not yet within reach of the promised land; but, like Moses, they draw up a mental picture of it. They have a presentiment of its lights and pleasant shores, and breathe in its fragrance and its sweet-smelling breezes in advance. Each day, each moment, they see the dawn of their deliverance rising in a less distant horizon, they feel the place of their eternal repose come nearer and nearer: Requies de labore. What else shall I say? These souls have charity which, this time, has taken complete and absolute possession of their hearts; they love God, they love Him so intensely that they are willing to be dissolved and annihilated for His glory.

St. John Chrysostom says: "The man who burns with the fire of divine love is as indifferent to glory and ignominy as if he were alone and unobserved on this earth. He is no more troubled by pincers, gridirons or racks than if these torments were endured by flesh other than his own. What is full of sweetness to the world has no attraction, no relish, for him; he is no more liable to be captivated by some evil attachment than is gold, seven times tested, liable to be tarnished by rust. Such are, even on this earth, the effects of divine love when it grips a soul."

Now, divine love acts upon the souls of whom I am speaking with all the greater force, in that, being separated from their bodies, deprived of all human consolations, and abandoned to a thousand martyrdoms, they are compelled to have recourse to God and to seek in Him alone all that they lack.

One of the greatest of their sufferings is the knowledge that the pains which they endure bring no benefit to them. Night has come for them, when they can no longer labour or acquire anything: "The night cometh, when no man can work."[210] The time when man is able to make satisfaction himself for his sins, accumulate merit and increase his heavenly crown ceases with death. The moment he enters the other life, every human being receives the pronouncement of his eternal sentence.

His fate is immutably fixed and he no longer has the option of accomplishing good or bad works, for which he can once more be answerable at God's tribunal. Yet, if the souls in purgatory cannot grow in holiness and amass new merits by their patience and resignation, they nevertheless know that they can no longer <u>lose</u> merit, and, for them, it is a sweet joy to suffer out of a free, altogether disinterested, love.

Without doubt this peculiar mixture of happiness amidst the cruellest torments is a state which our gross minds cannot comprehend; but ask the martyrs: the Teresas, the Lucians, the celestial lovers of the Cross. They will tell you that, most often, it is in sorrow and amidst afflictions and the most cruel spiritual desolations that he who seeks to live in God alone experiences a kind of foretaste of paradise, and feels the sweetest and most exhilarating joys and delights pour into his heart.

The souls in Purgatory love God; furthermore, they are loved by the Churches of Heaven and earth, who maintain continuous contact and relations with them. The Catholic Church appeals to the charity of her children, and, through their mediation, lavishes her petitions and aid upon them day and night. Every moment the charity of the good angels bestows upon them the heavenly dew which the good Jesus sends down from His heart. They love one another, and console each other in ineffable intercourse.

No unfathomable gulf separates these souls and their friends on earth, and we are free at every moment to bring them that drop of water which the rich fool sought in vain from the pity of Lazarus.

St. John once had a wonderful vision: he saw a temple, and, in the sanctuary of this temple, perceived an altar, and beneath this altar, the multitude of suffering souls: vidi subtus altare animas interfectorum.[211] These souls are not <u>in front of</u> the altar, as one commentator remarks; they are not permitted to be there. They participate in the fruit of the Eucharistic Sacrifice only indirectly, by

[210] John 9:4.

[211] Apocalypse 6:9.

means of intercession. They are below the altar, and await, resigned, although in torment, the portion which we are willing to convey to their lips. [212]

The Catholic Church has made no definition on the location of Purgatory. Different opinions have been expressed on this point by the Doctors and Fathers, and we are free to choose any of them without offending against orthodoxy or departing from the true faith.

St. Thomas, St. Bonaventure and St. Augustine teach that Purgatory, situated in the centre of the earth, is an intermediate abode between the Hell of the damned and Limbo, where the children who died unbaptized are detained, at least until the judgement.

They quote, in support of their opinion, the words sung by the Church's command: "Lord, deliver the souls of the faithful departed from the pains of hell and the deep pit."[213]

Likewise, these words from the Apocalypse: "And no man was able, neither in Heaven, nor on earth, nor under the earth, to open the book, nor to look on it."[214] From these words of St. John, it is certain that only just men were invited to open the mysterious book. Now, by this reference to those who are below the earth, does not the Apostle seem to give us to understand that there are some just people who are detained for a time in these dark depths? Elsewhere, in Ecclesiasticus, it is said: "I shall enter into the lower parts of the earth, and shall visit those who sleep, and the hope of salvation shall appear in their sight." Scholars have shown that the inspired author intended in this passage to indicate Limbo, where the Patriarchs and saints of the Old Testament rested in the bosom of Abraham. This explanation confirms, rather than invalidates, the view of St. Thomas and St. Bonaventure.

In fact, if the Patriarchs and the just of the Old Testament, once purified of all their actual sins, had the lower regions of the earth as their abode until the day when the sin transmitted to our race by Adam had been completely erased on the Cross,[215] it seems all the more fitting that souls guilty of actual sins for which they

[212] St. Jerome and several Doctors are of the opinion that, when the Holy Sacrifice is offered for a dead person, he ceases to suffer the pains of Purgatory for the whole duration of the ceremony.

[213] Libera, Domine, animas fidelium defunctorum de poenis inferni et de profundo lacu.

[214] Nemo inventus est dignus aperire librum, neque in coelo, neque in terra, neque subtus terram. (Apocalypse 5)

[215] According to tradition, Limbo, where the just of the Old Testament were detained after their death, was situated at the centre of the earth. The just of the Old Testament were not stained by original sin: they had the means of erasing it; yet, they were unable to enter Heaven because, in consequence of the sin of Adam, this abode had been closed to all the descendants of the first man, and could not be opened again, except by the merits of Jesus Christ.

have not sufficiently atoned should be punished and detained in the depths of the earth: Inferiores partes terrae.

The testimony of St. Augustine adds a further degree of probability to this opinion: in his Epistle XCIX, ad Evodium, he states that, when Christ descended into Hell, He went not only to Limbo but, also, to Purgatory, where He delivered some of the captive souls, as seems to be indicated in the Acts of the Apostles: Solutis doloribus inferni.

The second opinion concerning the location of Purgatory is shared by St. Victor and by St. Gregory the Great in his dialogues. Both maintain that Purgatory is not a fixed place, and that a large number of deceased souls atone for their faults on earth, and in the same places where they sinned the most frequently.[216]

Sacred theology reconciles these different testimonies by establishing, first, that Purgatory is a fixed place, with given bounds, situated at the centre of the earth, where the majority of souls go in order to atone for the faults by which they were sullied.

Nevertheless, Purgatory is not restricted to this one single place. Whether by reason of the gravity of their sins or through a special dispensation of divine wisdom, there are a considerable number of other souls who do not languish in that prison, but undergo their punishment on earth, and in that place where they had sinned. This interpretation, which comes from great theologians, explains and confirms a multitude of apparitions and revelations made to the saints, several of them having

[216] Unumquem purgari ubi potissima peccata commisit, sicut multis documentis saepe probatum est. (Hugo of Saint Victor: lib. II, De sacram., p.16, cap.IV)

marks of truth which make it impossible to dismiss them.[217]

In order fully to elucidate our doctrine, we shall select, among all the revelations quoted by St. Gregory in his dialogues, those of which the authenticity is beyond all question.[218]

In the annals of Citeaux, it is related that a pilgrim from the district of Rodez, returning from Jerusalem, was obliged by a storm to put in at an island close to Sicily. There he visited a holy hermit, who enquired about matters pertaining to religion in his country of France, and also asked whether he knew the monastery of Cluny and Abbot Odilon. The pilgrim replied that he

[217] Can the dead and the souls in Purgatory appear - and do they, in fact, sometimes appear - to the living? St. Augustine declares that such apparitions may take place, and have taken place on a number of occasions, by a special disposition of the divine will. He quotes, as proof, the souls of Moses and Samuel (1 Kings 28); the souls of Jeremias and the high priest Onias (2 Machabees 15), who reappeared on earth although still captives in Limbo. As for apparitions of blessed souls who dwell in Heaven, these are frequent in the lives of the saints. Theodoret, in Book 5 of his Ecclesiastical History, and Nicephorus, in Book 12, quote many examples. It is likely that, by virtue of the same divine disposition, the souls in Purgatory sometimes appear or reveal themselves for the salvation and guidance of the living. This is the teaching of St. Gregory the Great, who quotes various characteristics of these apparitions; but the probable doctrine is that the souls detained in the centre of the earth only rarely obtain permission to leave. As indicated by the event related by St. Bernard in his life of St. Malachy, the souls who reveal themselves to the living are generally those who have been sentenced to spend their Purgatory in the places where they lived on earth. Whatever may be the truth in these diverse opinions, it is certain that, in the very rare cases where the souls in Purgatory are permitted to reappear and show themselves to the living, their sufferings are not suspended; such an interruption would not be in their interest, as it would delay their entry into bliss. Just as the fire of Hell torments the demons living in the regions of the air, so, too, the souls in Purgatory endure their punishment in whatever place they are transferred.

[218] St. Gregory the Great says that Bishop Paschasius, a very austere and holy man, appeared to Herman, Bishop of Capua, at thermal baths near this town, and told him that he had been sentenced to undergo his suffering in this place, in punishment for his friendliness towards the archpriest Lawrence, who had rebelled against Pope Symmachus, declaring himself antipope.

St. Peter Damian had a similar vision which he relates in Epistle II, ad Desiderium. He quotes the case of a bishop spending his Purgatory in a river: this bishop appeared to a certain priest and grasped his hand, in order to make him feel the sharpness of his pain.

did, and added that he would be grateful if he would tell him what purpose he had in asking him that question. The hermit answered: very near this place, there is a crater, the summit of which we can see; at certain times, it belches up clouds of smoke and flame. I have seen demons carrying off the souls of sinners and hurling them into that frightful abyss, in order to torment them for a while. Now, on certain days, I hear the evil spirits conversing among themselves, and complaining that some of these souls have escaped from them; they blame pious persons who, by their prayers and sacrifices, hasten the deliverance of these souls. Odilon and his monks are the ones who seem to terrify them most. That is why, when you return to your country, I ask you in the name of God to exhort the Abbot and monks of Cluny to redouble their prayers and alms for the relief of these poor souls. The pilgrim, on his return, did as he was bidden. The holy Abbot Odilon pondered and weighed everything carefully. He sought enlightenment from God, and ordained that, in all the monasteries of his order, the second day of November each year should be established in commemoration of all the faithful departed. Such was the origin of the Feast of All Souls.[219]

St. Bernard, in his life of St. Malachy, quotes another case.

This saint relates that one day he saw his sister, who had been dead for some time. She was doing her Purgatory in the cemetery. On account of her vanity and the attention she had devoted to her hair and body, she had been sentenced to live in the very grave where she had been buried, and to witness the dissolution of her body. The saint offered the Sacrifice of the Mass for her for thirty days; at the end of this period he saw his sister again. This time she had been sentenced to complete her

[219] There is one objection to the authenticity of this story. It does not appear theologically admissible that the holy souls in Purgatory should be delivered up to demons to be tormented. First, it is in no way necessary that the evil spirits detain or convey these souls to the place of their expiation; once they know God's will, they obey and submit to it willingly. It is a pious belief that the souls who die in the friendship of God are led to Purgatory by their good angels, and that these assist them and appear to them for their consolation. The opinion that the souls in Purgatory have to suffer the presence and obsession of evil spirits is incompatible with the state of justice and holiness in which they are arrayed, and with the love which God has for them; if the demons had the power to practise their cruelties on these souls, it could not be by virtue of a command from God, but merely by His permission. All that need be said about the vision of this pilgrim from Rodez is that it is an image, a parable, suited to our dull minds, which God desired to use in order to depict the horror and darkness of the prison where the souls are cast. If, nevertheless, there are indeed souls, not among the reprobate, who are given over to the devil for a time, these can only be certain great sinners, guilty of enormous crimes, who had been reconciled to God only at the moment of their last breath. The common opinion of theologians is that, as a general rule, the holy souls in Purgatory are not tormented by demons.

Purgatory at the gate of the church, doubtless because of her irreverent demeanour in the holy place; perhaps she had distracted the faithful from the Sacred Mysteries in order to draw eyes and appreciation to herself. She was exceedingly sad, wearing a mourning veil, and was in extreme anguish. The saint offered the Sacrifice once more for thirty days, and she appeared to him for the last time in the sanctuary, with unruffled countenance, radiant in a white robe. The bishop knew by this sign that his sister had gained her deliverance.

This story records the universal custom, which prevailed from the very first ages of the Church, of praying for the dead over a period of thirty days. On this point, Christianity had merely followed the Mosaic tradition.

The patriarch Jacob, on his death-bed, said to his sons: "Bury me in the double cave...over against Mambre, in the land of Chanaan;" and the grandsons of Isaac mourned their father for thirty days. On the death of the high priest Aaron and his brother Moses, the people again observed this thirty days' mourning; and the pious custom of praying for the dead for a whole month soon became a law of the chosen people. St. Clement stated that St. Peter, Prince of the Apostles, liked to have prayers said for the relief of the dead, and St. Dionysius describes, in magnificent terms, the stateliness with which the faithful celebrated the funeral rites. From the very first centuries, the Church encouraged prayers for a month after the deaths of the faithful, in memory of the thirty days' mourning, observed under the Mosaic law.

O you that sorrow after creatures whom you wrongly think absent, you that shed tears because you can set eyes upon those cherished faces no more - understand that the doors of their prison are wide open to your prayers and charity.

The prophet used to gain solace from the deaths of his friends who had died in the peace of God by diligently visiting them and, with incomparable confidence, repeating the words: "I will penetrate to all the lower parts of the earth, and will behold all that sleep, and will enlighten all that hope in the Lord."[220]

Ah, we almost fear that our words may chill your devotion towards these souls; that, as you hear of their many positive consolations, your compassion may diminish, and you may not have for them all the pity that they deserve. Let us then recall that their happiness and consolations are mingled with sorrows and torments.

[220] Ecclesiasticus 24:45.

II

We said, my dear brethren, that those souls, confirmed in grace, are marvellously consoled by the certainty of their salvation. On the other hand, as they are freed from the body which, like a thick veil, darkened their view and understanding of invisible, supernatural things, they suffer cruelly from the delay in possessing God.

In this world, the absence and remoteness of God brings only a mild regret to the majority of men. Captivated by the lure of the goods of this world, absorbed in the display of tangible objects, we comprehend God too imperfectly to realize how much the loss of Him means; but, when we die, the veil of the senses will be rent; all our human attachments will perish, and the inanities which bemused us will have gone for ever. There will be no more amusements, pastimes and conversation. Then, our inclinations, aspirations and all our propensities will centre upon this divine Spouse, our sole and incomprehensible treasure.

These poor souls, eager to be embraced eternally, rush towards God, Who is their end, with more energy than a magnet attracts iron, and with a greater impetuosity than natural things rush towards their centre.

At this great ruin, which is death, in the complete separation from all those objects on which our life turns, the soul has nothing left other than this love which flees from him, leaving only the unimaginable regret that, through his own fault, he has delayed - by a day, a year or a century - that consummated union which, for him, must be the real and perfect, the sole and everlasting, happiness.

Imagine how bitter and heart-rending it is for a mother to bear the separation of a son who has left for distant lands, or has died a premature death, and whom she cannot hope to see again. From the moment when this mother's eyes cease to rest on that beloved child, a part of her life has gone: there is no joy or pleasure in the world capable of filling the deep, unfathomable void which the departure or loss of that son has created in her heart.

How much more bitter and heart-rending are the cries of the hapless soul! Can you hear him calling out from the desolate place of his atonement: Where is He Who is the soul of my soul? It is useless for me to seek Him on this bed of flames where I feel only gloom and emptiness! Oh, beloved of my heart, why keep me in this long suspense? Increase my torments - if necessary, put centuries of punishments into the minutes! How severely You punish me for my ignominy and indifference when You withdraw Yourself from my ardent soul which longs to see You, to lose itself in You and to dissolve in You!

To this punishment of separation from God is added the punishment of fire.

Let us state, however, in order to be precise, and to express no debatable and disputed opinion, that the Church

has not defined that the souls in Purgatory undergo the effects of a material fire. It is merely a truth of divine faith and theologically certain.[221]

At the first session of the Council of Florence, the Fathers of the Greek Church were unwavering in their formal refusal to accept the materiality of the fire of Purgatory; on the other hand, they unanimously acknowledged that Purgatory is a dark place where souls, free from the punishment of fire, endure very severe sufferings and penalties, consisting chiefly in the darkness and anguish of a cruel imprisonment. The Fathers of the Latin Church, who were unanimous in maintaining the opposite opinion, did not, however, consider that the Greek Church, on this point, strayed from the Faith. That is why, in the decree uniting the two churches, there was no mention of a punishment of fire. It was stated simply that those souls which have not entirely satisfied God's justice in this life endure, in the life to come, penalties proportionate to the number and gravity of their sins, and that the sufferings they endure are attenuated or shortened by the prayers and good works of the living, and particularly by the Sacrifice of the Mass.

[221] A truth of <u>ecclesiastical faith</u> is one which has been defined by the councils and popes, and which no one can deny without incurring the mark of heresy and becoming anathema, that is, being cut off from the household and communion of the Church.

A truth of <u>divine faith</u> is one which is contained in the deposit of revelation, but has not yet been defined by the councils, or the popes. Thus, before its definition, the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin was a truth of divine faith. One can reject truths of divine faith without being censured and declared a heretic, but not without incurring the mark of rashness and rendering oneself guilty of a very serious sin, unless one can plead the benefit of good faith, or is excused by invincible ignorance.

A <u>theologically certain</u> truth is a truth which follows from Holy Scripture, has been accepted by tradition and the teaching of the majority of the Doctors and Fathers and, consequently, is founded on irrefutable evidence.

To give an example and application of this threefold distinction, we shall quote the infallibility of the Roman Pontiff, denied by the Gallicans before the Vatican Council: it is a truth of divine faith and, since the Council, a truth of ecclesiastical faith. As for the existence of a material fire in Purgatory, it is, in our opinion, not only a theologically certain truth, but a truth of divine faith.

[Note by the publishers of the English edition. The distinction which Fr. Arminjon makes between those divinely revealed truths which have been defined as such by the Church and those which have not is theologically correct, but there seems to be some terminological confusion in his explanation, particularly with regard to the term "ecclesiastical faith". A truth of ecclesiastical faith is taken by Catholic theologians to be a truth which has been defined by the Church as <u>true</u>, but not proposed to be believed with divine faith (Hermann, <u>Institutiones Theologiae</u>, Introduction, art.VI); in other words, a truth which is not divinely revealed at all, but is taught by the Church because it is certainly true and closely connected with revealed truth. In correct Catholic terminology, a divinely revealed truth which has been proposed as such by the Church is called "de fide definita" (defined as of faith) while one which the Church has not yet proposed is called "de fide definibili" (able to be defined as of faith).]

If, in defining the punishments of Purgatory, the Council of Florence did not consider it opportune to mention the existence of fire, whether out of deference to the Fathers of the Greek Church, and in order not to hold back a long-sought reconciliation, or, in addition, because their error did not endanger the essence and substance of the dogma, the existence of a material fire in Purgatory must not be held as anything less than a proven truth, which cannot be subject to any doubt or attenuation. In the first place, at this very Council of Florence the materiality of the fire of Purgatory was maintained by the unanimous vote of all the Fathers of the Latin Church. So this opinion has in its favour a longer line of tradition, as well as the belief of almost all the doctors. St. Paul appears formally to teach it in these words: Salvi erunt sic quasi per ignem - Yet they themselves shall be saved, yet so as by fire; (1 Corinthians 3:15) and it should be noted that he does not use the particle "quasi" as a diminutive, but in order the better to explain the manner of purification. Finally, all the visions and revelations dealing with Purgatory liken the pains and the fire which are there endured to the pains and the fire of Hell, with the sole reservation that this fire is not eternal but temporary.

A question arises here which is not easy to answer: how can a material fire act upon souls separated from their bodies and upon pure spirits? We reply that this is a mystery of God's justice, a secret which human reason will never succeed in comprehending. All that theology teaches us about Purgatory is that this material fire is not identical with the human soul, nor united to it in substance, as, in this world, the spirit is to the body. When the saints and eminent doctors tell us that the reprobate and the souls in Purgatory are arrayed in a body of fire, they are speaking metaphorically, adopting our way of thinking. What is quite certain is that, as a number of doctors have maintained, the fire will not confine itself to forming a sort of prison or enclosure around the souls whom it torments and purifies; it will not merely make them suffer from the vexations which it inflicts upon their will, and from the obstacles it will place in the way of the use and full development of their intellectual powers and their sensory faculties.

The true opinion is that the fire of Purgatory, although corporeal, will act as an instrument of God's justice and, in some indescribable way, pierce the soul to the quick. This is the view expressed in the following words of St. Augustine: Cur enim non dicamus, quamvis miris, tamen veris modis, etiam spiritus incorporeos posse poena corporali ignis affligi.[222] So it will act directly upon the soul. The same thought is expressed more clearly by St. Gregory, when he says: "It is a visible, corporeal fire, which will cause an invisible fire and pain in the soul."[223]

Who can ever understand how penetrating this fire is which, unlike that of the earth, does not attack man through the medium of his material covering, but acts on

[222] Why should we not say that incorporeal substances can be really, though by means which our reason cannot comprehend or our words explain, chastened by the corporeal pain of fire? (St. Augustine: City of God, ch.6).

[223] Ex igni visibili ardor atque dolor invisibilis trahitur.

the quick of the substance: this active and marvellously efficacious fire, which penetrates the most secret recesses of the soul, as far as the channels uniting it with the spirit: Usque ad divisionem animae et spiritus - Reaching into the division of the soul and the spirit.[224] A fire which does not let any stain subsist; an immortal fire, which discerns even those defects which the eye of the creature cannot perceive; a fixed fire, as the prophet calls it, which crushes the guilty soul, consumes and encompasses it, without granting it a single moment's rest; a fire the intensity of which is not moderated by any relief, or subject to any alteration, and which puts the children of Levi to the test, like gold and silver in the furnace: Sedebit conflans et purgabit filios Levi et colabit eos quasi aurum et argentum - And he shall sit refining and cleansing... and he shall purify the sons of Levi and shall refine them as gold and as silver.[225]

In our world, pain is intermittent. A fever is not of the same violence all the time. Sleep suspends the sick person's groans. He can turn from one side to the other on his bed of suffering, and find solace in the conversation of his friends; but the fire of Purgatory consumes unceasingly and unremittingly. Every moment these souls feel and bear the whole weight and vigour of a pain which they are unable to put out of their minds for a single minute, a single second.

A certain person who underwent a terrible operation had refused to be anaesthetized. She suffered without uttering a sigh, gazing upon the picture of Jesus Christ. The operation took five minutes. When it was over, she said: "It seemed to me to have lasted a century." Just as it is recognized that a feeling of intense joy makes the mind oblivious to the passage of time, so one can imagine a pain so severe as to make one minute seem like eternity. If this is so - if, in Purgatory, minutes are the equivalent of years, and years the equivalent of centuries - what will it be like to remain in the depths of that dark prison for nights, for years on end, perhaps until the end of the world?[226]

[224] Hebrews 4:12.

[225] Malachias 3:3.

[226] The Church has made no definition concerning the duration of Purgatory. The theologian Dominico Soto expressed the opinion that no soul is detained in Purgatory longer than ten years. He sought to prove his contention on the grounds that, as Providence is free to substitute intensity in place of length of penalty, as will happen in the case of those who die a few hours or days before the last judgement, it is rational, and consistent with our ideas of the infinite goodness of God, to think that He will use this means of mitigation in order to hasten the entrance into Heaven of the souls which are so dear to Him. We may remark that this opinion is peculiar to the theologian Dominico Soto, and lacks any firm and weighty basis. Moreover, certain saints have had reason to believe, through revelation, that a large number of souls were condemned to Purgatory until the end of the world, and that, despite the assistance of the prayers and petitions of the Church, they have languished in that prison for some centuries. This may be true in very exceptional cases, as with great sinners who returned to God only on the point of death; but there is no evidence or testimony to show that this view should be extended to the greater number of the faithful departed. It is true

(Footnote continued on following page)

O you, whose lives are so lax, who do not fear to stain yourselves with a thousand faults in order to please the world or spare your body a moment's trouble, tell us - have you understood the mysteries of God's justice, and have you meditated upon the length of the torments that await you? Indica mihi si habes intelligentiam.[227]

O primitive Church, cradle of Christianity, model of all ages, who numbered as many saints as faithful and, taught by the Apostles, received the oracles of the incarnate Word at first hand: how frightful was your idea of the greatness of the penalties due to sin! You made amends in this life which astound us.

In the Church of the early ages canon law was applied in its full rigour. There was no remission or concession. Penance and works of satisfaction were imposed strictly according to what was required in order to satisfy completely the justice of God. That penance did not consist in reciting a few short prayers; it consisted of long fasts on bread and water, daily recitation of the psalms, long and painful pilgrimages, and a considerable number of pious works. A thief, depending on the amount stolen, was sentenced to two or five years' penance, a blasphemer to seven years, an adulterer to ten and often twelve years of fasting, tears and public prostrations on the threshold of the sacred place. On this frightful calculation, an entire life spent in the macerations of the anchorites, even if it were as long as that of the ancient Patriarchs, would scarcely be enough to atone for the most ordinary, habitual sins of the men of our time. How long and terrible the Purgatory of most sinners will be!

Without doubt, one thought capable of lightening the sorrow of those suffering souls would be that their memory is not lost, that the friends whom they have left on this earth are working to aid and deliver them. Alas, that is

(Footnote continued from previous page)
that the Church permits the endowment of masses in perpetuity, but she has no intention thereby of declaring that the souls for whose benefit these masses are said may be detained in Purgatory until the end of time. She permits the custom, first, because the judgements of God are hidden from her, secondly, so as to give the faithful the opportunity of redeeming their sins, and of satisfying God's justice, by the practice of charity and the endowment of charitable works. Lastly, the Church knows that, if her petitions do not benefit directly the soul for which they are offered, they are applied to the relief and deliverance of other, unknown and more abandoned, souls. The truth is that we cannot hazard any guesses as to the average length of time which souls spend in Purgatory. Revelations on this matter apply only to special, individual cases, and we cannot draw therefrom any general, authoritative induction.

[227] Job 38:1.

a consolation which their hearts cherish in vain.

True, it is our custom to show the sorrow which we render to their memory; and undoubtedly religion is far from condemning this honour rendered to grief. Rather, indeed, does it condemn the hardness of heart of those who have no sooner lost their parents and friends than they cease to remember them. The saints used to mourn their friends, but their greatest concern was to help them. It was not tears which St. Monica asked of St. Augustine, when, on her death-bed she said to him: "Son, I bid you remember me, each time that you offer the Sacrifice at the altar." It was not by tears that St. Ambrose sought to mark the deep attachment he felt for the Emperor Theodosius, when he said: "I have loved this prince, and, because I have loved him, I shall not leave him until I have led him into that abode to which his virtues call him. O people, hasten hither and, together with me, bestow upon the remains of this prince, the incense of your prayers, the outpourings of your charity and the grief of your penance."

What am I saying - tears? Those tears that promised ever to flow soon dry up. Our fickle, selfish hearts grow tired of calling out names which utter no sound in answer, of seeking to recall images which have for ever vanished from our sight. Caught up in the whirlwind of the world and its inanities, we shrink from such a grim and painful memory. Severance is followed by oblivion, and the pains of the dead are the most forgotten of all pains.

Poor deceased! After a few days spent in grief and mourning, a few courtesies paid to form and convention, you will be buried once more in a tomb, crueller and colder than the one in which you were first laid; and that second tomb will be oblivion - harsh, inhuman, unrelenting oblivion, like that winding-sheet, the final clothing of the dust of your limbs; oblivion, which will envelop your silent dwelling-places, which no one will visit any more; oblivion over your name, which no one will utter again; oblivion in your home, in the hearts of your friends and children, where no subject of conversation will evoke your memory. Yes, a deep, complete and irremediable oblivion, and this despite the most heart-rending farewells which were addressed to you, despite the vows to your immortal memory and the declarations so full of tenderness.[228]

One day Our Lord Jesus Christ met a most unhappy man, at the side of the pool. This man's face was as pale as death, his eyes were sunken and lustreless, and his limbs withered and stiff; he lay paralyzed and motionless on the bank of the pool of Probatica, trampled upon by passers-by, exposed to all weathers and all the inclemencies of the air. Nevertheless he was by no means afflicted with an incurable disease. For him to be cured there was no need to consult skilled doctors, or to search the valleys and mountains for medicines, or strange and rare herbs. It was enough to give him a little push and put him down into the pool at the time when the angel of the Lord descended to stir its waters. Yet, in a town as populous as was the

[228] Fr. Felix: <u>Discours sur les morts</u>.

capital of Judaea, amidst the mass of pilgrims who came from every part of the world for the feasts, there was not one relative, not one friend, to render him such an easy service. Jesus, seeing this paralytic one day, was moved to pity, and, with emotion in His voice, said to him: "Wilt thou be made whole?" The infirm man replied: "Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pond."[229] What a striking picture this unhappy paralytic gives us of the soul whose complaints I have described! They sit by the side of the pool of that blood which has saved the world. They have no power to gather up its fruits, or to administer the vivifying drops to themselves; and it may be for years that they have implored us in vain, and have been tortured, for lack of a helping hand.

In this world the afflicted person has always some expedient. The most unfortunate have at least their tears; and, when everything, both divine and human, fails us at the same time, when we have to contend with injustice and oppression and suffer abuses and excesses of power, we still have a place of refuge in our own hearts, where God always awaits us. Each of our sorrows can become a sacrifice for us, each can be turned into a crown and treasure. To suffer interminably, however, knowing that nothing will come of it; to shed hot tears, and to feel that their burning dew will bring no growth, and that suffering will follow suffering, until divine justice is satisfied: that is a situation capable of softening hearts of steel; a misfortune which can be mourned only with tears of blood, and to which no one, in whose soul any feeling of humanity and compassion lingers, can remain indifferent.

Ah, if, beneath that thick soil which covers their bodies, if, from the shelter of their dark impenetrable dwelling-places, these souls could awaken for a moment, and bring their harrowing cries and groans to our very ears and hearts - what depth of feeling would there be in their wailing, and with what tones of indescribable anguish would they appeal for our aid! Ah, they would say, have pity on us, you who were our friends. Break our fetters, save us, deliver us. Arise, go over the places where we have lived; and the deeper the silence over our tombs, the louder let your voices be raised. Priest of Jesus Christ, minister to all misfortunes, let this forgetful child hear the voice of his mother. I had reared him, I lived for him alone; he was the child of my heart. When I lay in my last agony, he would have wished to prolong my days at the cost of his own. Ask him how religion is powerless now to remind him of me. Priest of Jesus Christ, raise your voice louder still! Do not fear to bring shame and remorse into the soul of that unconcerned husband who seeks solace for his widowhood in licentiousness. Ask him where his sworn faith is, what has become of that tenderness and fidelity of which he gave me such warm and striking demonstrations, right up to the moment of my death. Ask him how it is that to-day I have to beg his solicitude and support with such heartrending cries.

Ah, he is still unmoved, and provides me with bitter proof that I am forever dead in his heart.

[229] John 5:7.

Tell our friends - and strangers as well who are not related to us by blood but who are our brothers in faith passing unconcernedly over that troubled sea of human life where they are swept along by the rapid waves just as we were not long ago - tell them to stop and consider whether there exists any pain more bitter and intense and, at the same time, more neglected and solitary than ours. Ah, we beseech you - brother, father, husband, friend - from the depths of this pool of fire, we implore you...a drop of water, a prayer, an act of fasting or alms-giving, a helping hand and we shall be saved. Brother, friend, father, husband: reflect that, if we are suffering, it is partly because of you.

Yes, that soul suffers because of us. That mother suffers because she was too soft with her son, because she did not correct his faults, or chastise the misdeeds of his youth. This wife suffers because she gave her heart too much to her husband - a heart which belonged to God alone - and showed an indulgence for him that was excessive and unthinking. This friend suffers because he was an accomplice in the disorderly life of his friend, and because he took up his causes and made them his own, sharing in his dissoluteness and profligacy: and we leave them to bear the weight of God's justice alone! In return for the misguided indulgence they had for us we are unwilling to relieve them of one day's expiation, to spare them centuries of torture!

Ah, if you knew that at this moment your father, your mother or your brothers - the people you love most of all - were about to perish in a fire or beneath a landslide, or that they were about to be engulfed by the sea or by flames; and if the only way to save them were to endanger your own life, run to their aid and hold out your hand to them, you would not hesitate, even if it meant risking your life, going through flames and allowing your hand to be burnt. If fear, or selfishness, or any other craven feeling, made you hesitate you would be ashamed of yourself and you would rightly consider yourself as the most heartless and thankless of men.

There is a story that, at the time of the Crusades and the wars waged by our forebears in the East, a Christian knight was taken prisoner by the barbarians. Cast into a hideous dungeon and unable to obtain the required ransom he faced only slavery and death. Suddenly a noble thought struck his daughter, tender as she was, and in the prime of her youth. Alone and without a guide, she traversed vast areas, and succeeded in crossing over immense deserts. Arriving at the coast, she offered to work for the price of her fare. At length, she reached the shores of Europe. Taking no rest, she at once travelled through the towns, and appealed to the compassion of all, going from house to house in order to collect the sum demanded by the barbarians. As soon as she secured it, she prepared once more to face those perilous journeys and that laborious voyage, from which she had escaped only by a miracle. Finally, she rejoined her father and, thanks to her superhuman efforts, and with the aid of the ransom obtained at the cost of so many perils and such severe hardship, managed to save her sire and snatch him from the fetters of captivity.

What courage in a young girl! What energy and strength of filial affection! Like that heroic girl, we, too, have received from God a tender, compassionate and loving soul. When an unfortunate person, in extreme want, stretches his hand out to us, we do not ask ourselves whether he is united to us by friendship and blood; our duty, our fortune and, especially, our heart, instantly go out to him. If necessary, we would not hesitate to deprive ourselves of food and the most essential things in order to rescue an unfortunate man from degradation, captivity or death. Well, for the sake of our parents, those who have loved us, who are bound to us by the closest bonds, we claim neither the sacrifice of your health, nor your freedom, nor the whole of your goods, but merely the drop of water which the rich man vainly asked of the compassion of Lazarus.

What else shall I add? How many are there among you who, after a dissipated, disorderly life, have lost even the courage to make amends, and the will to repent? Who shudder at the thought of the day when their soul, stripped of their body and stained with a mass of iniquity, will be exposed alive before the gaze of the Sovereign Judge? There is an easy way to obtain mercy at the last moment, and it is the one which Jesus Christ Himself teaches us: Facite vobis amicos ut recipiant vos in aeterna tabernacula - Make unto you friends...that when you shall fail they may receive you into everlasting dwellings.[230] Obtain for yourselves, with that gold which has served as the instrument of so many evil passions, the support and protection of the holy souls in purgatory.

There is another thing which the dead say to us: you are mistaken about our desires, and the kind of relief which our pains demand; you thought you were showing us your sorrow and love by arranging a magnificent funeral. On the spot of our last abode you have erected monuments, which are not so much tributes to our memory as a gratification of your pride. What is the purpose of all this ostentation and splendour? If need be, pull down those mausoleums, smash those monuments and stones, and purchase with their rubble the prayers and suffrages of the Church.

That is what the dead ask of us; and, if we listen to them, truly, I tell you, our charity will be blest. The dead will not be thankless. One day, freed from their torments by our solicitude, they will help us by their powerful intercession, and, when we fly up towards the heavenly fatherland, they will accompany us in procession; they will sing around us the hymn of thanksgiving, and increase the joy of everlasting bliss which will be our reward and our glory.

[230] Luke 16:9

SIXTH CONFERENCE

Eternal punishment and destiny of the reprobate

> Ibunt hi in supplicium aeternum.
> And these shall go into everlasting punishment. (Matthew 25:46)

There is one terrible truth in Christianity which in our times, even more than in previous centuries, arouses irrepressible horror in the heart of man. That truth is the eternity of the pains of Hell. No sooner is this dogma stated than minds become agitated, hearts shake and pound, passions harden and rage against this doctrine and the unwelcome voices which proclaim it. Ought we, then, to be silent, leaving shrouded in oblivion an essential truth about man's most important concern: his final destiny beyond the short years of his exile on earth? Yet, if Hell is a reality, whatever silence we might maintain over this fundamental question would not shake its certainty. All the attenuations and palliatives of human language cannot shorten its duration. It would be the height of folly to convince ourselves that if we turn our minds away from this fatal possibility and try hard not to believe in it we shall manage some day to avoid its rigour.

In this series of conferences, wherein we propose to deal with the things relating to the future of man and his immortal destiny, we could not leave out the punishments of the life to come without failing in our duty and acting like a false, negligent doctor who, for the sake of sparing his patient the suffering of an operation, calmly left him to die. On this subject, Christ Himself did not think it fit to speak with circumspection and reserve. He continually emphasizes the punishments reserved for sinners, and, on many occasions, speaks about exterior darkness, the fire which is not extinguished, and the prison without an exit, where there will be gnashing of teeth and unending tears.

When human justice wishes to strike down an evil man, a scaffold is erected in the public square and the people are summoned to be present at the terrible spectacle. In some lands, the broken body of the miscreant is left for days on end hanging by the road or upon the gibbet where he breathed his last in order that such an example may frighten wrongdoers who might be led astray by wicked passions. Jesus Christ acts in the same way as human justice: He shows the malefactor the sword which hangs over his head, so that, being stricken with fear, he may not contravene His law, and may do good instead of evil.

St. Ignatius of Loyola used to say that he knew of no sermons more useful and beneficial than those on Hell. Reflections on the beauties of virtue and the delights and

attractions of divine love have little influence upon coarse, sensual men. Amidst the noisy pleasures of their lives, the seductive bad examples set before them, the traps and pitfalls set beneath their feet, the threat of Hell is the only curb powerful enough to keep them on the path of duty. For the same reason St. Teresa would often bid her austere nuns to go down to Hell in spirit and thought during their life, so as to avoid, she said, going there in reality after their death.

In the study which we are about to undertake on this serious question of the fate reserved for those who die at enmity with God, we shall avoid all disputed opinions, proceeding by rigorous reasoning and with the aid of sound theology, taking as our sole basis Scripture and the true knowledge of tradition and of the Fathers. In the first place, does Hell exist, and is it certain that the punishments endured there are eternal? Secondly, of what nature is the punishment of Hell, and where does it take place? Thirdly, can the mercy of God be reconciled with the idea of a justice which no reparation can ever appease?

No man can undertake the study of these supreme considerations without hearing the echo of these words of Scripture resounding in his innermost soul: "Be watchful, serve the Lord thy God and keep his commandments; for in this is the whole of man." He who reflects upon these awesome truths is certain to improve; he will at once feel his spirit transformed, and his nature enhanced in strength of virtue and love of good.

I

That the punishments of Hell are eternal is a truth formally taught by Holy Scripture; it is part of the Christian creed; numerous councils have defined it as an article of faith.[231] St. Matthew, in chapter 18, and St. John, in chapter 14 of the Apocalypse, speaking about the pains of the demons and reprobate, say that they will be of endless duration.[232] St. Mark, chapter 9, and Isaias, chapter 66, say that their fire will not be extinguished, and their worm will not die. Quoting these words St. Augustine remarks that the nature of this worm and the materiality or immateriality of the fire is open to discussion; but what is true beyond all dispute from the words of the prophet is that the rigours of this fire will never be moderated, and that the tortures of this worm will never diminish.[233]

When Jesus Christ speaks about the supreme sentence which He will pronounce one day, He retains and confirms

[231] Et qui bona egerunt, ibunt in vitam aeternam, qui vero mala in ignem aeternum. Haec est fides catholica, quam nisi quisque fideliter, firmiterque crediderit, salvus esse non poterit. (Athanasian Creed)

Si quis dixerit etiam post mortem hominem justificari posse, aut poenas damnatorum in gehenna perpetuas futuras esse negaverit, anathema sit. (Vatican Council (1870): Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith)

[232] Et fumus tormentorum eorum ascendet in saecula saeculorum.

[233] St. Augustine.: Ad Orosium, chapter 6.

the same parity between justification and condemnation; neither in the rewards of the just nor in the punishment of the wicked does He make any distinction of degree or time: "And these shall go into everlasting punishment, but the just into life everlasting."[234] Thus, if eternal life can have no limit of time, eternal death, too, will be without limit or end.

From these various testimonies, we know that mercy is excluded from Hell, and that there can be no place there for redemption. Quia in inferno nulla est redemptio. Moreover, there are only three ways whereby the reprobate and the demons could be released from justice and obtain freedom or mitigation of their pains: by a true and sincere repentance; or by the power of the prayers of the saints and the works of satisfaction offered up by the living; or else by the destruction of their existence - in other words, as it is absolutely impossible for God to take them to Himself, He would, by making them cease to exist, thereby bring their torments to an end. Now, the reprobate cannot do penance. God has never granted pardon to Satan because Satan has never repented. Sometimes, says St. Thomas, a person repents and hates sin in one or two ways: absolutely or accidentally. He who hates sin absolutely, hates it on account of its intrinsic ugliness, and because it is an offence against God; he who hates it accidentally, hates it, not out of love of God, but out of love of himself: in other words, he does not really detest sin, but only the pain, the evils which it has brought him. The will of the damned is still inclined to evil, and their horror and detestation of their punishment is neither repentance nor atonement.[235] Undoubtedly they are consumed by desires and dreams; but the object of these dreams is their own happiness, which they would arrange independently of God.

Such is the dream of the demons and the damned, a dream eternally futile which consumes them in unceasing despair and rage. So, the damned cannot repent. Can they share in the prayers and merits of the living? If this were so, Lucifer and his angels would be able, in the more or less distant future, to return to favour; consequently they would become holy creatures, worthy of reverence and love, by the same right as the cherubim and the archangels, whom they would one day embrace in an eternal communion. It would follow, too, that the Church would be obliged to pray for the demons. The demons are, in truth, our worst enemies, but the precept of charity requires us to pray for all our enemies without exception. The Church prays for the persecutors in this world because, during the present life, they can produce worthy fruits of repentance; but even on the day of Judgement, when she will be

[234] Ibunt hi in supplicium aeternum, justi autem in vitam aeternam. (Matthew 25:46)

[235] Poenitere de peccato contingit dupliciter, uno modo per se, alio modo per accidens. Per se quidem de peccato poenitet, qui peccatum quantum est peccatum abominatur. Per accidens, qui illud odit ratione alicujus adjuncti utpote poenae vel alicujus hujusmodi. Mali igitur non poenitebunt per se loquendo de peccatis, quia voluntas malitiae in eis remanet; poenitebunt autem per accidens, in quantum affligentur, de poena quam pro peccato sustinent. (S. Thomas: Summa Theologica, Q.98, A.11)

filled with love and holiness, she will not pray for those sentenced by the just Judge to everlasting torments. If the reprobate can expect to be saved one day, not only must the Church pray for them but, in addition, we do not see why she would forbid the faithful to venerate them and why she would not gather up the remains of the Neros, Robespierres and Marats, to honour them on the altar, by the same right as the ashes of the Aloysius Gonzagas, Vincent de Pauls and Francis de Sales.

In short, it is evident that the sufferings of the reprobate will have no end and that their existence will never be destroyed. Holy Scripture depicts their pitiful state by calling it "secunda mors", a "second death". St. Gregory says: "It will be a death that will never be consummated, an end always followed by a new beginning, a dissolution that will never bring decay."[236] St. Augustine expresses with no less vigour and clarity the sad condition of that death which, while letting the soul subsist eternally, will make it endure its pangs and horrors in all their intensity: "It cannot be said that there will be the life of the soul in Hell, since the soul will not share in any way in the supernatural life of God; it cannot be said that there will be the life of the body, since the body will there be a prey to all kinds of pains. Hence, this second death will be more cruel than the first because death can never bring it to an end."[237]

To these theological proofs, let us add the proofs from reason.

If there were not an eternal Hell, Christianity would disappear and the moral order would be abolished.

This truth about the eternity of punishment is linked essentially to the great truths of religion - to the Fall of man, the Incarnation and Redemption - which logically imply its certainty. If there were no Hell, why would Jesus Christ have descended from Heaven, why His abasement in the crib, His ignominies, sufferings and sacrifice on the Cross? This excess of love on the part of a God Who became man in order to die would have been an act devoid of any wisdom, and out of proportion with its declared aim, if it had been simply a matter of delivering us from a temporal, transient punishment, such as is Purgatory. Man, then, had fallen irremediably upon evil days, and was condemned to infinite disgrace, since only a divine remedy could raise him up again.

[236] Fit ergo miseris mors sine morte, finis sine fine, defectus sine defectu: Quia et mors vivit, et finis semper incipit, et deficere defectus nescit. (St. Gregory the Great: Morals 1, 9, chapter LXVI)

[237] Miseria sempiterna, quae etiam secunda mors dicitur; quia nec anima ibi vivere dicenda est, quae a vita Dei aliena erit; nec corpus quod aeternis doloribus subjacebit; ac per hoc durior ista secunda mors erit, quia finiri morte non poterit. (St. Augustine: City of God, book 19, chapter 28)

Otherwise we should have to say that Christ redeemed us only from a finite punishment, from which we might have freed ourselves by our own amends; and, in that case, would not the treasures of His blood be superfluous? There would no longer be any redemption in the strict and absolute sense of the word: Jesus Christ would not be our Saviour; the debt of boundless gratitude and love which He demands of men would be an inordinate and unwarranted claim. With the God made man cast down from the throne of our hearts and our worship, Christianity would become a hoax, and all consistent minds would necessarily be led to reject revelation and to reject God Himself.

If there is no eternal Hell, there is no moral order.

The foundation of the moral order is the absolute and essential difference between good and evil. Good and evil are different in essence, because their conclusions are different and they result in opposite outcomes; but, if we abolish the eternal sanction of punishment, vice and virtue reach the same conclusion. Each, by different means, attains its last end, which is repose and happiness in the bliss of God. The same fate falls to the share of those who have been instruments of evil and to those who, right up to the end, have been incorruptible vessels of good.

You may say: "Agreed, but it will be a thousand or a hundred thousand years sooner for the just; a thousand or a hundred thousand years later for the wicked." What does that matter? A period of atonement, however long you suppose it to be, does not constitute an essential difference between the destiny of the one and that of the other. During our fleeting, transient life, when moments, once passed, never recur, a period of a thousand or a hundred thousand years is of some consequence; but, as soon as man has entered into eternal life, a thousand or a hundred thousand years no longer have any significance: they are less than a grain of sand in the desert, or a drop of water in the ocean. Imagine a future composed of punishments, as long as you wish, double the years, pile centuries upon centuries - so long as the end is the same for all, the past counts for nothing. Once a punishment is over, the extent of its duration, compared with eternity, will seem such a tiny quantity, so infinitesimal, that it will be as if it did not exist.

It would in fact be true to say - since there is no perceptible difference between one eternity and another - that sin would have brought no harm upon the sinner. For example, let us suppose that, as punishment for my sins, God hurls me into the flames for centuries. I have this consolation: I know that I have for myself a measure of comparison, mathematically equal to that of the just man. I have eternity; so there is an eternity of joy and glory for one who has served God and loved Him until death, and an eternity of joy and glory for the wicked man who thrilled with pleasure as he did evil, and constantly spurned the divine laws and commandments. Now, if these two final ends are the same, if, by way of evil even as by way of good, we unfailingly attain life - the life of eternity - the conclusion is inescapable that virtue and crime are two means towards an equal security; that it is optional for man to follow one or the other as he pleases; and that the most sordid lives and the most pure lives

are of equal merit and dignity, since both lead to the same perfection and happiness.

Once such a scheme is granted, morality, public order and all semblance of honesty must disappear from the earth. Justice is stripped of its sanction, conscience is a prejudice, virtue and sacrifice are a stupid exertion. Remove the fear of eternal punishment from mankind and the world will be filled with crime; the most execrable misdeeds will become a duty whenever they can be committed without risk of prison or the sword. Hell will simply happen sooner: instead of being postponed until the future life, it will be inaugurated in the midst of humanity, in the present life. As a contemporary writer has said: "There can be no middle way for society - it is either God or the gun." If there is no sanction beyond death, might prevails over right, the hangman becomes the pivot and corner-stone of the social order, and justice will be proclaimed in the name of death instead of being proclaimed in the name of God. "Besides," remarks another moralist, "by virtue of what right will the courts repress crime, when it has the approbation of divine impunity, and when eternal justice undertakes not to bestir itself to impose its legitimate punishment?"[238]

The conscience of the nations has rebelled against this monstrous consequence. Amidst the explosion of error and the collapse of true belief, the doctrine of a future state of rewards and punishments has remained unshaken. It is found amongst the pagans. Virgil gave expression to their belief in these famous lines:

Sedet aeternumque sedebit infelix Theseus. (Aeneid, VI, 618).

Rostroque immanis vultur obunco
Immortale jecur tondens...
Nec fibris requies datur ulla renatis.
(Ibid. VI, 597)

"The vile miscreants whose souls are incurable," says Plato (Phaedo, 113E[62]), "are tormented by punishments which convulse but do not cure them. Souls who have committed grave crimes are hurled into the abyss which is called Hell. Such is the judgement of the gods who dwell in Heaven: the good are reunited to the good, the wicked to the wicked."

How astonishing this assent among all men - poets, philosophers, peoples, kings, civilized and barbarian - to a truth which troubles our minds, and which men would have so much interest in denying! Here we might shelter behind the authority and weight of this fundamental axiom: "Quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus" - "that which has been believed always, everywhere and by everyone" - is, necessarily, the truth. Every dogma has been changed except this one.* All the important points of Catholic theology have given rise to dispute, except Hell which has escaped that common law. It has come down to us, without encountering one man who disputed its justice or, at least, cast doubt upon its awesome certainty. "The Protestants, who denied so many things, did not deny this. Destroyers of whatever most offended the human spirit, of penance, virginity and the value of good works, they did

* Note by the publishers of the English edition. Clearly Fr. Arminjon means that every dogma has been changed by heretics, not by the Church.

[238] Lacordaire: De la Sanction du Gouvernement Divin.

not strip Hell of its terrifying attributes. Their hands, which had not respected the door of the tabernacle wherein the flesh of the Man-God reposes in bounty and sacrifice drew back from the threshold of this place of suffering..."[239]

Contemporary rationalism alone has dared to go as far as to deny it, and, strange to say, has done so by taking refuge in the very bosom of divine perfection. It has impugned the justice, greatness and wisdom of God and, even while denying the Redemption, appeals to that very excess of love which Jesus Christ poured out as He expired on the Cross.

"God," it is said, "is too perfect, too sublime, too noble a being to want to crush a frail creature eternally beneath the panoply of His power, one who has been led into evil, by an outburst of anger, or by weakness. That would be an act of vengeance and retaliation, unworthy of His glory and perfections." We reply that, if crime went unpunished, greatness would cease to be the prerogative of God, and would belong in its fullness to sinful man. It would rest with him, by a single act of his will, to make rebellion triumph against the divine government. So God must have been labouring under an illusion the day when, for His glory, leaving His state of repose, He enacted the fundamental law that the creature must tend towards Him in each of its aspirations, serve and love Him by constant acts of praise, allegiance and worship? God would then no longer be our essential and final end.

Let us suppose, as some have dared to maintain, that Hell is merely a place of vexation and sorrow where the captive soul undergoes only a mitigated, limited suffering. Let us imagine, on this supposition, Satan and his accomplices surpassing themselves in rebellion and pride, and saying to the God who rejected them: "We are in good shape, and we possess a tolerable enough existence for us to agree to do without you forever. It is true that we are far from possessing perfect bliss, but we have a quality of life and repose which is our own work, and we are content with it: if we are not radiant like your angels, at least we are not your subjects, we do not serve you or obey you."

Such would be the sentiments of every creature shut out from God's bosom if he succeeded in rejecting his heritage without experiencing pain, intense and unending, like the happiness which he freely and obstinately spurned. Were God, in order to alleviate the misery of the devils and the damned, to allow them but a shadow of good, a slender hope, or a drop of water to refresh them, they would cling to that shadow, that semblance, with all the strength of their exhausted, gasping will, they would strive with their whole soul after that crumb of solace, seeking to beguile themselves with it, and to delude themselves as to the extent and depth of their misfortune; and one would have to be ignorant of man's nature to imagine that he would not resign himself to this mitigated Hell, rather than bend the knee and submit.

[239] Lacordaire: <u>De la Sanction du Gouvernement Divin</u>.

earth."[253] Finally, let us quote Suarez's argument, which complements and further clarifies St. Thomas's. "Hell," he says, "is a prison which will also serve as an abode for the rebellious angels and for the demons; this abode cannot be other than the most unpleasant, obscure and ignominious of all created places; it is fitting that it should be at opposite ends and at the greatest distance from the one destined for the elect. Now, the elect will reign eternally in the highest part of Heaven, which is the empyrean heaven, and so the lowest part of the earth is the place where the damned will suffer their eternal torments."

Let us observe, however, that it is not a truth of faith that Hell is situated in the centre of the earth. The Church has not defined anything on this point; it is simply the most probable opinion, based upon the almost unanimous testimony of the Doctors and Fathers.

And whatever may be the case, the important thing, as St. John Chrysostom says, is not to know where Hell is, but to ensure that we shall not, one day, be cast into it: ne igitur quaeramus, ubi sit, sed quomodo eam (Gehennam) effugiamus.[254]

Such, then, seems to be the place of Hell.[255] The fire which tortures the devils and the damned is a material fire: a material fire which makes its action felt on spirits and on separated souls. It remains for us to consider how the implacable severity of divine justice can be reconciled with its infinite mercy.

[253] Augustinus in libro XII, Super Genesesim, duas rationes tangere videtur, quare congruum est infernum esse sub terra. Una est, ut quoniam defunctorum animae carnis amore peccaverunt, hoc eis exhibeatur quod ipsi carni mortuae solet exhiberi, ut scilicet sub terra recludantur. Alia est quod, sicut est gravitas in corporibus, ita tristitia in spiritibus, et laetitia sicut levitas; unde sicut, secundum corpus, si ponderis sui ordinem teneant, inferiora sunt omnia graviora ita secundum spiritum, inferiora sunt tristiora. Et sic, sicut conveniens locus gaudio electorum est coelum empyreum, ita conveniens locus tristitiae damnatorum est infimum terrae. (St. Thomas Aquinas: Summa Theologica, Q.98, A.7)

[254] St. John Chrysostom: Homily on the Epistle to the Romans, 4,5.

[255] The objection is raised that the centre of the earth cannot hold the multitude of the damned. However, as Suarez observes, after the resurrection, Hell will be enlarged by the whole space of Purgatory and of the limbo of children who died unbaptized, which will be empty. Children who die unbaptized will never see God; but several Doctors express the opinion that they will live on the surface of the earth, where they will enjoy a merely natural happiness. As for the earth, its volume can be increased and the abyss expanded as much as necessary, in accordance with the words of Isaias: Dilatavit infernus animam suam - Therefore hath hell enlarged her soul. (Isaias 5:14)

II

A witty man once said of the wicked: They are always getting in the way, in this world and in the next. In one sense it may be said that sinful men "get in God's way" to an even greater extent than the worst malefactors "get in the way" of human society.

It is of faith that God desires the salvation of all men and that, so far as it lies with Him, He excludes no one from the fruits of the Redemption. He did not willingly create Hell; on the contrary, He exhausts all the means of His wisdom and all the secrets of His tenderness to forewarn us against such a misfortune, as He says by the mouth of Isaias: Quid est quod debui ultra facere vineae meae et non feci?[256]

If God were able to suffer, no anguish would be comparable to the sorrow which His heart would feel when He is compelled to condemn a soul. The holy Cure d'Ars once said: "If it were possible for God to suffer, as He damned a soul He would be gripped with the same horror and the same tremor as a mother who was herself compelled to let the blade of the guillotine fall upon the neck of her child."

Behold Jesus Christ at the Last Supper: He gazes upon Judas with an expression which shows sadness and the bitterest grief. He is violently troubled, and in the last extremity of consternation. He understands, better than we can ever conceive, how horrible is the state of a man adrift, irremediably lost, left without any means of retracing his steps and taking his destiny back into his own hands. He tries, by every imaginable means, to avert the loss of this wretched man; He casts Himself at his feet and Kisses them; He admits him, despite his unworthiness, to the feast of His sacred flesh; and, when the darkness, which more and more engulfs the obdurate soul of Judas, has blocked every avenue by which divine grace might have forced its way in, Christ weeps. He seems to forget that this traitor has chosen Him as the victim of his dastardly greed. He sees only the horror of his fate, and says in anquish: "It were better for him if that man had never been born."[257]

O you that accuse the Creator of harshness, and reproach Him for not going to the extreme limits of His omnipotence in order to prevent His creature from perishing eternally, tell Him <u>your</u> way, teach Him <u>your</u> secret. What do you want God to do?

Would you ask Him to abolish Hell? To abolish Hell would be to abolish Heaven. Do you believe that the martyrs, anchorites, virgins and saints, at this moment delighting in the joys of bliss, would have kept apart from seductive pleasures, trampled upon worldly snares, sought out solitary places, come through persecutions and

[256] What is there that I ought to do more to my vineyard, that I have not done to it? (Isaias 5:4)

[257] Bonum erat ei si natus non fuisset homo ille. (Matthew 26:24)

braved the hangman and the sword, if they had not had in mind the Master's word: "Fear ye not them that kill the body and are not able to kill the soul; but rather than fear him that can destroy both soul and body in Hell."[258]

Divine love awoke in them only when, by courageous mortification, they were detached from sin and sensual habits. The starting-point of their justification was fear: "Initium sapientiae timor."[259] The thunder which aroused them from their slumber and lethargy was the terrifying word: Eternity. It was then that they looked upon their luxurious houses and the gilded panelling of their palaces, and said: This is where every day we amass treasures of wrath, where all seductions come together for our perdition. Hatred of God, flames, an endless curse for a day's pleasure - this is what awaits us... The next day these men would go barefoot, dressed in sackcloth, seeking the road which leads to the wilderness and the desert. Without these merciful fears, the City of God would never have filled up; we should all have strayed from the right path; no one would have done good, non est qui faciat bonum, non est usque ad unum.

God cannot abolish Hell without abolishing Heaven. Shall He then wait, pardon and keep on pardoning? That is just what He does. In this life He never abandons even the person who spurns Him. He pursues him right into the sanctuary of his conscience, through an inner voice which does not cease for a single instant to make itself heard. In the face of the temptation which incites us to evil this voice rings out and calls to us: Beware! If we turn a deaf ear, He does not hasten to cut the thread of our life, as would be His right. He does not watch out for the moment when we go astray in order to make this the final moment of death for us. He comes back to us. He makes us feel the sting of remorse, and, not disheartened by our refusals, waits for years. He lets the years of maturity succeed the wildness of youth, and the icy hand of old age replace the illusions that beguile even manhood: and all His efforts are in vain. A man's last hour finally rings; most often it is preceded by illness, the premonitory sign of his approaching end. This man is still obdurate. One minute before his last sigh, God still offers to take him to Himself and save him from the fires of the abyss. His voice has no more strength, and his condition is desperate. It would be enough that, in the intimacy of his heart, he should utter these simple words: "I love you, and I repent." These words would be his saving grace... - and the sinner stubbornly refuses to say them. We ask: what can God do? Shall He, to sanctify the hardness of heart of this creature, overturn the whole plan and all the counsels of His wisdom, annihilate the darkness by a foolish act of omnipotence, because a besotted man has blinded himself so as to have no part in the divine light? Ah, God has the right to wash His hands and say: "O man, thy perdition is thy work, and not mine. Perditio tua ex te, Israel."

[258] Et nolite timere eos qui occidunt corpus, animam non possunt occidere; sed potius timete eum qui potest et animam et corpus perdere in gehennam. (Matthew 10:28)

[259] Ecclesiastes 1:16.

Yet why should grace and redemption be excluded from Hell? When a man's eyes have been opened; as he sees the last of his illusions crumble, and, terror-stricken, he realizes the full extent of his wretchedness, why would God not let a final ray of His mercy fall upon him? Why would He not hold out a hand to this unfortunate man, who would grasp it with a love and gratitude proportionate to the immensity of his deliverance? We do not hesitate to reply that God cannot - He cannot, at least, without losing His infinite dignity. He would be obliged to bow down, of His own accord, before a rebellious, obdurate creature who, far from appealing to Him, hates and curses Him. Death has placed the sinner in a position which leaves him no choice. He knows it with a certainty which overwhelms his free will. He remains hardened in hatred and pride, magnified by his tears and despair. To arouse a salutary, meritorious sorrow in him, he would require a grace. That grace he does not seek, does not want. True, he abhors his punishment, but he has a supreme hatred of God, as well as of the gifts and lights emanating from the Heart of God.

And yet, is God just, and does He not go beyond all proportion, when He punishes a passing fault, committed in a single moment, with an eternity of pains? Here, reason is powerless, for God is the greatest of mysteries. Sin is a mystery as unfathomable as the majesty of Him whom it offends; and the punishment due to its evil is another immeasurable mystery which the human mind will never succeed in solving.

All we can say is that, if we consider the person of God, the insult offered to Him by sin is an <u>infinite</u> insult. Now as man, on account of the limitations of his nature, cannot sustain a punishment infinite in <u>severity</u> and <u>intensity</u>, it is only just that he should suffer a punishment infinite in <u>duration</u>. Human justice is the image and configuration of divine justice. The right to punish and sentence a guilty man to death is conferred upon earthly tribunals for the service and good of men. They pass sentence for crimes, not because of their intrinsic deformity and because they offend God, but because they are harmful and prejudicial to the common good and the right ordering of human society. Yet they have the right to inflict a perpetual punishment upon a murderer whose crime was committed in a single moment, to remove him for ever from human society because he has violated the moral and human order. All the more reason why God has the right to inflict a perpetual punishment upon one who has violated the universal and divine order, and to banish him for ever from the society of Heaven.

It is in no way repugnant, observes St. Augustine, that God should restrict His mercy to the years of the present life, so that, when these have passed, there will be no place for pardon. Do not the princes of the earth act in the same way, when they refuse to reprieve men locked up in prison even though they show repentance and sincere detestation of the crimes which they have committed?

Among the various schemes devised in order to reconcile God's mercy with justice, the most rational, the most acceptable, and the one which, at first sight, appears to

provide a satisfactory solution to the formidable problem of human destiny, is the scheme conceived by Pythagoras and the Oriental sects, according to which, instead of casting a man into endless ignominy, God will introduce him to a second period of trials where, as in the preceding ones, there will be a mixture of light and darkness, the path of freedom will be open to him, and in it there will be temptations, divisions and conflict between God, dimly perceived, and creatures who parade their seductions.

Let us at once admit that, of all the doctrines opposed to Christianity, the doctrine of metempsychosis or transmigration of souls is unquestionably to be preferred. At a superficial glance it appears to leave belief in an immortal life intact, and seems not to impugn the divine attributes nor to deprive human law of its sanction. But, if we look at this doctrine in detail, we see clearly that it places us back amidst all the preceding difficulties, and raises others still more insoluble. As an illustrious Christian philosopher observes: "If this second life to which you introduce man is not purer than the first - if his soul dies there a second time through sin - to which period will God confine Himself? Shall the soul have an imprescriptible right to retrace the course of its migrations, without God ever being able to restrain and punish it other than by giving it the right to continue to offend Him? Instead of that frightening prospect in which the judgement is seen as life's awesome barrier, the sinner would go to the grave, feeling as secure as a man passing under a portico, and would say to himself, with all the derision of his impunity: The universe is large, the centuries are long; let us first complete our passage through worlds and times. Let us go from Jupiter to Venus, from the first heaven to the second, from the second to the third; and if, after spaces and periods beyond number, it should happen that there are no more suns left for us, we shall present ourselves before God and say to Him: Here we are, our time has come; make us new heavens and new stars; for, if you are weary of waiting for us, we are not weary of cursing you and of managing without you."[260]

Finally, we may say, love is all-powerful, with its own secrets and excesses, of which our hearts can have no inkling and, whatever may be said, cannot consent to condemn forever a creature made by its own hands, redeemed by its own blood. Ah! We might indeed set love against justice if it were justice that punished. But justice was propitiated nineteen centuries ago, on Calvary; at the foot of the Cross it forgave men the debts which they had incurred for their crimes, casting away the sword of rigour, never to wield it again.

Let us listen to St. Paul: "Who shall accuse against the elect of God? God is he that justifieth. Who is he that shall condemn? Christ Jesus that died; yea that is

[260] Lacordaire: De la Sanction du Gouvernement Divin.

risen also again, who is at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."[261]

It is because malediction comes from love that there can be no redemption therefrom.

If it were justice that punished, love might intervene once more on the mount and say: Mercy, Father, spare man and, in exchange for the death that is due to him, receive the homage of my flesh and blood!

However, when it is the very one who is to us more than a brother, more than the most affectionate friend, who hardens that heart riven with love and changes it into an inexhaustible furnace of hatred, how can the ingratitude of the man who has wrought this transformation (all the more terrible as it is unnatural) dare to expect hope and refuge?

O you who, at one time or other on this earth, have loved with a love that is sincere, ardent and boundless: you know the demands and the laws of love. Love offers itself for a long time, insistently and abundantly; it suffers, dedicates itself unreservedly, humbles itself and becomes small. But one thing which renders it implacable, and which it never forgives, is obduracy in contempt, contempt maintained until the end.

Go, then, ye cursed, the Saviour will say on the day of His judgement: Ite maledicti. I did everything for you; I gave My life, My blood, My divinity and My person for you. And in return for My infinite generosity, I asked only for these simple words: I obey and I love You. You have constantly spurned Me and have responded to My approaches solely with these words: Go, I prefer my gross concerns and my brutish pleasures to You.

Be your own judges, the Saviour will add. What sentence would you pronounce against the most dearly beloved creature who displayed the same indifference and same obstinacy towards you?

It is not I who condemn you, it is you who have damned yourselves. You have chosen, of your own free will, the city where egotism, hatred and revolt have established their dominion. I return to Heaven where My angels are, and thither I bring back this Heart, the object of your insults and scorn. Be the children of your own choice, stay with yourselves, with the worm that does not die and the fire that is never extinguished.

Let us tremble, but let us also be penetrated with a lively and unshakable confidence! Damnation is a work of love. It is the incarnate mercy which will determine our fate and convey the eternal sentence. It is easy to avert it while the present life lasts. Love in this world never requires a perfect parity between the fault and the penalty. It is content with little - a sigh, a sign of goodwill. Jesus Christ opens His Heart to us, the price

[261] Quis accusabit adversus electos Dei? Deus qui justificat. Quis est qui condemnet? Christus Jesus, qui mortuus est, imo qui et resurrexit, qui est ad dexteram Dei, qui etiam interpellat pro nobis. (Romans 8:33,34)

of His blood and His conquest. He destines eternity for us; not an eternity of tears and suffering, but an eternity of bliss which we shall possess with Him, in the bosom of His Father, in union with the Holy Ghost and in the very centre of His glory. Amen.

SEVENTH CONFERENCE

Eternal bliss and the supernatural vision of God

Haec requies mea in saeculum saeculi
hic habitabo quoniam elegi eam.

This is my rest for ever and ever;
here I will dwell, for I have chosen it.
(Psalm 131:14)

Our destiny is an enigma, which reason alone cannot explain; but faith elevates our thoughts, strengthens our courage and enkindles our hope.

It tells us: have no fear, you are not wandering along some out-of-the-way, uncertain path. Beyond our mortal years, there is a new life, of which the present one is only a portrait and an image. On this earth, we are travellers; but in the world above, beyond the stars and all space, lies our heritage and native land.

Pilgrims and exiles, we now live beneath tents: in the world to come, the Lord will build us permanent dwelling-places.

The foolish man, who has no understanding of our destiny and our hopes, accuses the Creator of injustice, pointing out signs of imperfection in the designs of divine wisdom. He is like a savage or an inhabitant of a remote island who one day goes into one of our building yards. There he sees stones scattered about, materials lying on top of one another, workmen carving metals and cutting away marble; and in the spectacle presented by this activity, he sees only a picture of confusion and ruin. He does not know that the apparent disorder will, one day, engender an order of admirable perfection. In the same way, we err in our judgements on the conduct of God towards men; we see nothing more than a pointless harshness in the mystery of suffering; we bear the burden of life without courage or dignity, because we do not know how to raise our eyes and our hopes above the limited sights and perspectives of the present life, and because we do not reflect upon their destiny and end.

Our destiny is the possession of God and eternal life: to live in that abode from which all evil is absent and where we enjoy a multitude and abundance of every good, a place which is commonly called Heaven. Heaven: this is the torch before which the vivid appeal of earthly things fades, the light which by transforming our judgements makes us cherish poverty, sickness and the insignificance of our state of life as a good, and makes us regard riches, the glamour of honours, the favour and praise of the world as an evil. The thought and expectation of Heaven impelled Paul to face the most arduous labours and the most formidable perils, giving him a superabundance of joy amidst his sufferings and afflictions. The thought of Heaven enkindled a holy thirst for

martyrdom among the confessors, and made them indifferent to worldly honours and comforts.

When they beheld the pageantry of kings and the magnificence of courts, Polycarp, Ignatius of Antioch, Anthony and their like were filled with aversion and, with disdain in their hearts, they exclaimed: Earth, how vile you appear to me when I contemplate Heaven!

Consider the traveller who returns from distant lands, bathed in perspiration and exhausted by his long journey. He walks painfully, bent over with fatigue and leaning upon his stick, but, once he reaches the summit of the hill, and discerns, far away in the distance, at the farthest horizon and merged with the clouds, the steeple of his hamlet, the roof that saw his birth and the trees that shaded his childhood games - at once all lassitude departs and, finding again the vigour of his youth, he runs as if on wings. In the same way, when our constancy weakens and we no longer feel equal to the sacrifices which the law of God requires of us, let us lift up our eyes and turn our thoughts and hearts towards our heavenly home.

Yet, how can I describe the marvels of the City of God, that vision and those joys beyond words, which no language can express and which surpass all the conceptions of human understanding? Heaven is something that we have not seen. We travellers, wandering in this valley of darkness and tears, are reduced, like captive Israel on the banks of the Euphrates, to hanging our harps and zithers upon the weeping willows of this wretched, human life. No human voice, no lyre can ever succeed in producing songs and tunes in unison with the melodies and sweet harmonies with which that indescribable city resounds. We can speak of it only obscurely, by way of rough and defective comparisons. Our sole resource is to call to mind the sketches to be found, here and there, in the Sacred Books and in the treasury of the Doctors, as well as in the dim and incomplete insights which the Fathers had on that happy abode. Nevertheless, let us hope that divine grace, coming to the aid of the weakness of our understanding, will compensate for the insufficiency of our words, and that, to some extent, we shall be able to turn souls away from base affections and make them yearn to possess the everlasting fatherland.

Let us observe that Holy Scripture calls Heaven <u>requies</u>, repose. Furthermore, we are told that there are two kinds of inhabitants in this abode: in the first place, God, Whose temple and throne Heaven is, then the angels and men, called to be united with God, and to share His happiness. Thus Heaven is a place of rest for man, a twofold truth which we propose to elucidate and develop.

I

In Holy Scripture, God calls Heaven His repose, <u>requies</u>. Heaven is the end and termination of created things, in nature and in time; the supreme glorification of the infinite Being in His intelligent creatures, when, raising them to the ascending heights of all progress and perfection, He will set His seal upon the irrevocable grandeur of our destiny.

In order to set out - as far as our weakness permits - the splendours of this repose of the Almighty,

let us imagine an artist who has just completed a masterpiece and, in a surge of genius, has erected on earth a monument destined to be the climax of his fame, and an inimitable challenge for future ages. In his work he has exhausted all the secrets of his art. The world applauds and admires. The artist, on the other hand, gives way to a feeling of discouragement and sadness, grieving that he is merely a man. In the cold flight of his imagination, he has caught an image, glimpsed a perfection or an ideal which he is unable to express in any form on the chill canvas or the mute stone, and upon which all the cold strokes of his brush and all the power of his art are come to nought. Our artist, seeing the delighted crowds fall at his feet, remains pensive and mournful amidst their praise and acclaim; he is not satisfied, and enjoys no rest.

If, however, the hand and the power of our artist were equal to the breadth and thrust of his spirit; if he were the master of nature and able to bend it to his exaggerations and dreams, to transform it into a perfect, living image of the ideal conceived in his mind; if he had the ability to animate the marble and to infuse it with feeling and life and if a light more brilliant than that of the sun were to radiate from the gold and precious stones arranged in such profusion and with such perfect art; if, finally, matter, released from its gravity, rose of its own accord to that level in the air whither the wings of his genius had raised it, <u>then</u> that monument erected by a great architect, that canvas, produced by the brush of a genius, and that marble sculpted by an incomparable artist would be finished works, excelling in beauty all that our language has in its power to depict or our mind to conceive. At such a spectacle all mankind would be lost in breathless wonderment from which no other marvel could rouse them. The artist would have achieved his supreme ideal; he would be satisfied and would enjoy repose.

Heaven is not the ideal of a human intellect: it is the repose of the divine intellect, the ideal and masterpiece of God, Whose power fecundates the void; Who, by virtue of one word, can make a thousand beautiful things appear in an instant such as we could never remotely imagine; a thousand worlds, in comparison with which the earth and sky are less than mud and foul smoke. God is as much superior to man as His ideal is above that which the noblest and keenest mind could possibly conceive. We lack the elements necessary to form even an imperfect sketch of it. All the pictures that we might seek to paint are mere vain and crude shifts, similar to the efforts of a man born blind who, in order to form an idea of light, from which he is cut off, seeks comparisons and analogies in the dense, impenetrable darkness that presses down upon his eyelids.

St. John, on the island of Patmos, was transported in spirit beyond the bounds of time; and God revealed to him, as it were, a shadow and a reflection of the ideal of eternal life. As a matter of fact, so as to bring his visions within the capacity of our feeble minds, he recounts them in figurative language, with images borrowed from nature and the present life. These images are not to be interpreted in a material sense; nevertheless, they contain striking analogies. It is possible for us to find therein a pale semblance of that glory and those splendours, which surpass all experience and all words.

"And I, John, saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice from

the throne, saying: Behold the tabernacle of God with men.[262] This city is built of living stones[263]... and he showed me a river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street thereof, and on both sides of the river, was the tree of life, yielding fruits every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no curse any more; but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him. And they shall see his face; and his name shall be on their foreheads. And night shall be no more; and they shall not need the light of the lamp, nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God shall enlighten them; and they shall reign for ever and ever.[264] And, behold, there was a throne set in heaven, and upon the throne one sitting. And he that sat was to the sight like the jasper and the sardine-stone. And there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald. And round about the throne were four and twenty seats; and upon the seats four and twenty ancients sitting; clothed in white garments, and on their heads were crowns of gold. And from the throne proceeded lightnings and voices and thunders. And there were seven lamps burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.[265] The four and twenty ancients fell down before him that sitteth on the throne, and adored him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying: Thou art worthy, O Lord, our God, to receive glory and honour and power; because thou hast created all things, and for thy will they were and have been created.[266] After this, I saw a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations and tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and in sight of the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands. And they cried with a loud voice, saying: Salvation to our God, who sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb. And one of the ancients said to me: These are they who are come out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and have made them white in the blood of the Lamb...and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell over them. They shall no more hunger nor thirst; neither shall the sun fall on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne, shall rule them and shall lead them to the fountains of the waters of life, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."[277]

What marvellous descriptions! What human brush could produce a more colourful and expressive picture of the place of light, serenity and sweet transports! Truly, it is the most vivid and striking image of the sweet thrills of joy which God destines for His beloved ones.

Beyond this happiness and these radiant feasts, speech is powerless, the mind is lost and cannot conceive of any other triumph or splendour capable of pleasing human

[262] Apocalypse, 21:2,3.

[263] Ipsi tamquam lapides vivi superaedificamini. (1 Peter 2:5)

[264] Apocalypse 22: 1,2,3,4,5.

[265] Apocalypse 4:2,3,4,5.

[266] Apocalypse 4:10,11.

[267] Apocalypse 7:9,10,12,14,16,17.

intelligence. At the sight of this, St. John felt enraptured: in his inebriation and wonder he cast himself down on his face to adore the angel, who had revealed to him such sublime mysteries.

Yet to say that these sights and harmonies are the reality of Heaven, the highest ideal of God's creative art, would be an affront to the sovereign goodness and omnipotence. Even the inspired word cannot rise to realities which extend beyond the bounds of reason and surpass all the strength and capacity of our nature.

Let us listen to the great apostle Paul, immersed in the most exalted raptures, conveyed in spirit as far as the third Heaven, and into splendours more profound and ineffable than those experienced by the Eagle of Patmos, as he exclaims: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for those that love him."[268]

O inspired prophet, when you tell us that eternal life is the collection of all the attractions of the world, of all the beauties portrayed in the Sacred Books, and when you teach us that the flowers of spring, the tint of meadows and fresh-flowing limpid waters are to be found there, you are assuredly not straying into fable and imaginary pictures. That is really what Heaven is: all our riches, beauties and concords, but infinitely more than these. When you describe the elect in Heaven as being subtle, immortal, impassible and clothed in a sweet light or, rather, in a divine glory which dwells in them and penetrates them more subtly than the sun penetrates the purest crystal, you are not being deceived by some illusion. Heaven is that, too; it is our subtleties, our lights and our glory, but infinitely more than these. Lastly, when you compare the future bliss to the sweetest and most intoxicating transports of the soul, to a joy ever new, freed from all disquiet and passion and maintaining its intensity and strength through all eternity, you do not feed us with false hopes; for Heaven is our transports and all our joys, but raised beyond all calculation, expression and comparison. The eye of man has not seen, nor the ear heard, anything comparable or close to it. The reason is that the good things which God prepares for us surpass all that our senses can perceive, all that our experience is capable of acquiring, all the thoughts of our minds and the desires that will ever arise in our hearts.

Nec in cor hominis ascendit. St. Bernard, in his <u>Sermon 4 On Christmas Eve</u>, says: "Never has man seen the inaccessible light, never has his ear heard the inexhaustible symphonies, nor his heart tasted that incomprehensible peace." "There," adds St. Augustine, "shines a light which no place can contain, there resound praises and song which are unlimited in duration. There are fragrances which the air does not blow away, savours that never fade, goods and sweet joys unaccompanied by any distaste or surfeit. There, God is contemplated continuously, is known without any error of apprehension, and praised without weariness or diminution."[269]

[268] 1 Corinthians 2:9.

[269] Ibi enim fulget quod non capit locus; ibi sonat quod non rapit tempus;ibi olet quod non spargit ventus; ibi sapit quod non minuit edacitas: ibi haeret quod non divellit satietas; ibi siquidem videtur Deus sine intermissione; cognoscitur sine errore; amatur sine offensione; laudatur sine fatigatione. (St. Augustine: <u>De spiritu et anima</u>, chapter XXXVI.)

Heaven is a kingdom of such beauty, a bliss so transcendant, that God has made it the sole object of His thoughts; to this creation, the only one truly worthy of His glory, He directs the universality of His works; the destiny and succession of empires, the Catholic Church, with her dogmas, sacraments and hierarchy, are ordered towards the consummation of this heavenly life. Faith teaches us that the assistance of divine grace is indispensable to man for him to accomplish the smallest work of merit, such as a sign of the Cross or the mere invocation of the name of Jesus; all the more reason why eternal life, which is the end to which all supernatural works tend, deserves to be called the crowning and the apex of all the graces bestowed upon us. In the words of St. Paul: "Gratia Dei vita aeterna. The grace of God is life everlasting."[270]

The plan and the whole ordinance of the Incarnation requires that the state of bliss, which is its end fruit, should be of a more perfect order and beyond all natural happiness, such as, outside the divine order of grace, would have been the recompense for morally good works accomplished in the pure state of innocence. When, at the time of the six days, the Creator willed to establish the heavens and lay the foundations of the earth, adorning it with everything that could make it precious and attractive, He spoke just one word: Dixit et facta sunt; but, when He willed to construct the city of God, He brought to bear all the treasures of His wisdom, chose His own Son as architect, bade Him work with His own hands at this important task and not to spare His blood, sweat or tears in His labour. He tells us that nothing defiled shall enter the sanctuary of all justice. He desires that the guests at the eternal banquet should feed on His flesh, wash in His blood, transform themselves and raise the powers and capacities of their souls by becoming, even in this life, as one divine nature and disposition. In short, in the construction of the immortal dwelling-place, He deigns to take infinite pains, exhausts the depths of His knowledge and carries preparation to the extreme. He wishes this incomparable abode to be truly His house, the highest manifestation of His attributes and glory, so that on the last day, when He contemplates His supreme work, this great God, so jealous of His honour, may be able in all truth to say: It is well. I have brought the greatest of my designs to its perfection; beyond it, I see no kingship, no greatness, that can be bestowed upon the creature whom I have destined to reign with Me through all eternity. I am satisfied, I have achieved My ideal and obtained My repose: Complevitque Deus opus suum quod fecerat, et requievit ab universo opere quod patrarat - And God ended His work which He had made, and He rested from all His work which He had done.[271]

Heaven is God's ideal, the repose of His intellect. Let us add: it is the repose of His heart. The heart goes further than the mind. It has aspirations and impulses, unknown to genius, which go beyond all the bounds of inspiration and thought. Thus, a mother sees her son rich and honoured; the most brilliant crowns glitter on his head; the mother cannot conceive of any new fortunes or new empires for her child. Her reason says: Enough! Yet her heart calls out: More! The happiness of my child is greater than all the dreams in which my mind can indulge; it does not come up to the limits and presentiments of my love, nor attain my heart's ambition.

[270] Romans 6:23.

[271] Genesis 2:2.

As no mother ever loved her dearest son, so the Lord loves His predestinate. He is jealous of His dignity, and could not permit Himself to be outdone by His creature on the score of fidelity and generosity.

The Lord cannot forget that the saints, when they once lived on earth, paid homage to Him by the total donation of their repose, their happiness and their whole being; that they would have liked to have an inexhaustible flow of blood in their veins, in order to shed it as a living and imperishable pledge of their faith; that they would have desired a thousand hearts in their breasts, so as to consume them in the unquenchable fires of their love, and to possess a thousand bodies, in order that they might deliver them to martyrdom, like victims unceasingly renewed. In His gratitude, God exclaims: Now it is My turn! The saints have made Me the gift of themselves: can I respond other than by giving Myself, without restriction or measure? If I place in their hands the sceptre of creation, if I surround them with the torrents of My light, that is a great deal; it is going beyond their highest hopes and aspirations, but it is not the utmost endeavour of My Heart. I owe them more than paradise, more than the treasures of My knowledge; I owe them My life, My nature, My eternal, infinite substance. If I bring My servants and friends into My house, if I console them and make them thrill with joy by enfolding them in the embrace of My charity, this satisfies their thirst and their desires superabundantly, and is more than the perfect repose of their hearts requires; but it is not enough for the gratification of My divine Heart, for the repletion and perfect satisfaction of My love. I must be the soul of their souls, I must penetrate and imbue them with My Divinity, as fire penetrates iron; I must unite Myself to them, face to face, eternally, by showing Myself to their spirits undisguised and unveiled, without the intervention of the senses. My glory must illuminate them, exude and radiate through all the pores of their being, so that, "knowing Me as I know them, they may become Gods themselves."

"Oh My Father," exclaimed Jesus Christ, "I have asked of You that, where I am, those whom I have loved may be there with Me. May they be engulfed and lose themselves in the ocean of Your splendours; may they desire, possess, enjoy and then desire again, may they sink into the bosom of Your beatitude and may it be as if nothing remained of their personality but the knowledge and experience of their happiness."

Here human language fails, and the intellect, in amazement, bows submission. Is our doctrine a kind of mysticism? Are the hymn and the hopes which such sublime prospects arouse in our innermost hearts just a poetic dream; or is the vision of God which we have just set forth a truth and a certain fact, resting on a syllogism which the Fathers have attested to us and proved irrefutably by their imagery and inspired words? We must have recourse to theological argument, and suspend for a moment our songs and transports; for it is good to strengthen disturbed and wavering souls by dealing with this subject as it deserves, and combatting all the objections which naturalism and cold reason seek to raise in order to obscure or contest it.

Is created being capable of uniting itself so closely with God that it sees Him face to face, facie ad faciem? What will the mode of this vision be? When we see God as He is, shall we know Him in His integrity and without re-

striction? - three important questions that must be resolved.

If we consider things from the narrow compass of our reason, God cannot be seen by any creature. God is the uncircumscribed, unlimited being. In order that an object may be known, says St. Thomas authoritatively, it must be contained in the mind of the person who knows; and it can be contained therein only in accordance with the forms and capacity for knowledge which that mind possesses.[272] Thus we cannot see and know a stone, except insofar as the image of this stone, transmitted by our senses, is made present and, as it were, contained in our understanding. Hence the axiom: "Nothing is in the intellect which is not first in the senses."[273] St. Paul expresses the same truth when he says: "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made."[274] To take the angels, they are endowed with a nature more perfect than ours, they have no need of the aid of tangible things in order to rise to the perception of intellectual truths, they are an admirable likeness of the divinity, and need only contemplate their own being and nature in order to rise to the knowledge of the existence of God and of His divine attributes. This mode of knowledge always occurs by representation, per speculum et in enigmate. For man, it is external and material creatures which act as a mirror. For the angels, it is their cogitative nature and, though pure spirits, they do not have the power to rise to the knowledge of God directly, and without intermediary, facie ad faciem.

That is why no one has ever seen God. Deum nemo vidit unquam. God "inhabiteth light inaccessible; whom no man hath seen, nor can see."[275] God is at an infinite distance from men and angels, and is invisible in Himself.

Nevertheless it is of faith that man will one day see God, as He is, in the brightness of His essence.[276] Jesus Christ has said: "He that loveth me shall be loved of my Father; and I will love him and make myself manifest to him."[277] God said to Abraham: "I will be thy reward exceeding great - Ego ero merces tua magna nimis."

The vision of God, as described by St. Paul, has ever been the object of the desires and the expectation of all the Patriarchs and Prophets, an expectation which God could not disappoint without derogating from His wisdom

[272] Cognitio contingit secundum quod cognitum est in cognoscente, cognitum autem est in cognoscente secundum modum cognoscentis. (St. Thomas: Summa Theologica, "De Cognitione Dei")

[273] Nihil est in intellectu nisi prius in sensu.

[274] Invisibilia Dei, per ea quae facta sunt intellecta conspiciuntur. (Romans 1:20)

[275] Qui lucem inhabitat inaccessibilem, quem nullus hominum vidit, sed nec videre potest. (1 Timothy 6:16)

[276] Videmus nunc per speculum in aenigmate, tunc autem facie ad faciem. (1 Corinthians 13:12)

[277] Si quis diligit me, diligetur a Patre et ego diligam eum et manifestabo illi meipsum. (John 2)

and His justice.[278] "Every soul free from sin," says the Council of Florence, "is immediately admitted to Heaven and sees God in His Trinity, as He is, according to the degree of his merit, one in a more perfect another in a less perfect manner."[279] The Holy Council adds: "This vision of God in no way comes from the forces of nature." It does not correspond to any desire or any necessity of our hearts.

Set apart from revelation, the human mind could not have conceived the slightest suspicion of it, nec in cor hominis ascendit - neither hath it entered into the heart of man. (1 Corinthians 2:9) Eternal life is the highest miracle, the most sublime mystery; it is the flower in full bloom or, better still, the fruit of grace, the seed and root of which the incarnate Word, by the power of the Holy Ghost, has implanted in the centre of humanity; and, so that we may attain eternal life, God required to imprint a new form in our minds, and superimpose a new faculty.

Let us add in passing that, as the vision of God is not connatural to man, its deprivation does not necessarily bring about sensory pain and the pain of fire. Thus children who die without baptism will not be admitted to the vision of God: nevertheless, they will enjoy God to a certain extent, they will know Him with the aid of the light of their reason, and they will love Him tenderly, as the author of their being and the dispenser of all good. The reason for this doctrine stems from the great principle that man, considered in himself and in the state of pure nature, differs from the man degraded by sin as much as he who is naked differs from him who has been stripped of his honours and prerogatives by a deserved punishment and degradation. Consequently every man with the use of understanding and freedom is predestined to eternal life, and possesses, by this fact, the capacities and means needed to reach this sublime reward. If he does not obtain it, he will feel immense grief, having through his own fault lost the good that should have been his crown of glory. But children who die unbaptized do not possess the kernel of glory; they have never been able to apprehend its price; their minds, unenlightened by baptism, do not possess any disposition or aptitude preparing them for the vision of supernatural things, any more than animals have the capacity to be taught by the light of reason and to grasp mathematical and speculative truths. Thus it is inconsistent to grant that they will suffer the loss of a good to which by nature, they were not destined. These children who have died unbaptized will not be separated from God completely: they will be united to Him in the sense that they will attain their natural end, and will see God, as far as it is possible to see Him, through the medium of eternal beings, to the extent that He manifests Himself in the marvels and harmonies of creation. A precious doctrine, which reconciles both divine justice and divine goodness, a sweet consolation for Christian mothers who mourn their children killed in a natural accident without having been reborn by the sacrament of the Redemption!

[278] Ostende faciem tuam et salvi erimus. (Psalm 69) - Ostende nobis partem et sufficit nobis. (John 14)

[279] "Ex decreto unionis."

Man will see God face to face; but how will this vision take place? It is of faith that we shall not see Him by representation, by an image formed in our minds. It is also of faith that we shall not rise to the knowledge of Him by the aid of reasoning, or by way of demonstration, in the manner whereby we apprehend universal and abstract truths in this world. It is likewise certain that we shall not see Him partially and dimly like distant objects, of which we cannot discern all the features, but which we see only imperfectly and on certain sides. God will not be seen in this way. He is a single being, not made of parts. He is in the blade of grass and in the atom integrally. When we say that He is present in every sphere and in all places, our mind leads us astray: God is not in any place, but all spheres and places are in Him. He does not live in any time, but His eternity consists of an indivisible instant, in which all time is contained. So we shall see Him as He is in His simplicity, in His threefold personality and in the same way as we see the face of a man in this world, sicuti est facie ad faciem.[280]

This vision will operate by an immediate impression of the divine essence in the souls with the aid of a supernatural light called the light of glory. Suarez defines it thus: "A created quality and a supernatural, intellectual capacity, infused into the soul, which will give it the aptitude and the power to see God." This light of glory will transform man, says St. Dionysius; it will deify him by imprinting in him the seal and likeness of celestial beauty, and make him the image of the Father; it will expand and augment the soul's capacity for knowledge to such an extent that it will become able to apprehend immense and boundless good. Just as, by means of the light of the sun, the eye can see the variety of tangible things and, so to speak, comprehend the whole extent of the universe; just as, aided by the light of reason, it knows the reason for its own existence, and the intellectual truths; so, immersed in the light of glory, it will have infinity as its domain, and, in a sense, will comprehend God Himself. Scripture teaches us that the light of glory is the light of God: In lumine tuo videbimus lumen. By it our souls will be so immersed in the light of the divine presence that we may say, with St. Augustine, that, in a sense, they will no longer know through their own knowledge, but from the very knowledge of God, and that they will no longer see with their so weak and limited eyes, but with the very eyes of God: Erit intellectui plenitudo lucis. The transports which the divine vision will arouse in the elect will make their hearts superabound in the most unutterable joys; it will be a flood of delights and raptures, life in it inexhaustible richness and the very source of all good and all life.[281] It will be, as St. Augustine goes on to say, like a donation from God of His own heart, so that we may love and rejoice with all the energy of the love and joys of God Himself: Erit voluntati plenitudo pacis.

[280] Qualitas creata et habitus et virtus intellectualis, supernaturalis et per se infusa intellectui, qua redditur proxime potens et habilis ad videndum Deum. (Suarez: De Deo, I,II, chapter XIV.)

[281] Inebriabuntur ab ubertate domus tuae, et torrente voluptatis tuae potabis nos; quoniam apud te est fons vitae, et in lumine tuo videbimus lumen. (Psalm 35:19)

Eternal life, says St. Paul, is like a weight, like being overwhelmed with all delights, intoxications and transports: aeternum gloriae pondus; a weight which, by refreshing man rather than annihilating him, will inexhaustibly renew his youth and vigour. It is a source, forever fertile, where the soul will drink in abundance of substance and life. It is a marriage, in which the soul will clasp its Creator in an eternal embrace without ever feeling any diminution of the rapture it felt on that day when, for the first time, it was united to Him and pressed Him to its bosom.

Even so, the elect who see God will not comprehend Him; for the Lateran Council teaches: "God is incomprehensible to all created beings." We shall see God as He is, some more, others less, according to our dispositions and merits. Nevertheless, we could not teach theologically that the Immaculate Virgin herself, who sees God more clearly and perfectly than all the angels and all the saints together, can attain an adequate vision and knowledge of God. God is infinite, and all that can be said is that the creature sees Him, sees Him as He is, _sicuti est_, entire, _in integro_, and yet does not see Him, in this sense that, what he succeeds in discovering of His perfections is nothing compared with what the eternal Being Himself contemplates, in the splendour of His Word and in union with the Holy Ghost. If we might be permitted to use a crude and incomplete image - for it must be remembered that every comparison taken from tangible things loses all proportion and analogy when it is applied to the realm of uncreated life - we would say that, in comparison with God, the elect are like a traveller standing on the banks of the ocean. The traveller knows that it is the ocean, with his own eyes he sees the ocean extend and unfold in the immensity, and he says: I have seen the ocean. Nevertheless there are reefs and distant islands which he does not discern, and his gaze has not encompassed all the river-banks and all the contours of the ocean. Accordingly, contemplation of God will not mean immobility but, above all, activity, an ever-ascending progression, where movement and repose will be bound together in ineffable harmony.

In order the better to understand this, let us imagine a scholar who has been given wings by nature; he would have the power of traversing all the regions of the stars and the firmament; he would be enabled to explore all the hidden marvels in the countless groups of constellations, and this scholar would go from one sphere to another, from one planet to the next. As he advanced further into the immensity, he would meet one surprise after another, thrill upon thrill, seeing richer spectacles appear ceaselessly, opening up vaster and more radiant horizons to his gaze. However, a moment would come when he reached the limits. But infinity has no limits, no bottom or shore. The happy mariners of that fortunate abode will never cry, like Christopher Columbus: Land! Land! They will say: God, God always, God yet more. There will forever be new perfections, which they will seek to gain; forever purer and more intoxicating delights which they will aspire to taste. They will go from glory to glory, joy to joy; for, as St. Gregory of Nyssa says, "The infinite Good has no limits, the desire which He arouses is immeasurable."[282]

[282] St. Gregory of Nyssa: _De Vita Monastica._

II

The vision and knowledge of God are sufficient for the fullness and perfection of man's happiness; the knowledge he will have of contingent being, and of visible, eternal nature is the accompaniment and accidental part of his happiness.

St. Thomas explains this truth to us with his incomparable, argumentative vigour:

"All knowledge," he says, "by which the created spirit is perfected, is ordained to the knowledge of God as its end. Hence it follows that he who sees the essence of God has his spirit raised to the highest perfection, and does not become more perfect by seeing objects which are not God; unless, however, the objects contribute to make him see God more fully. On the same subject, St. Augustine says, in Book V of his Confessions: 'Unhappy is the man who knows all created things and is ignorant of You, O Supreme Truth. Happy, by contrast, he who knows You, even if he should know nothing of any created thing. He who knows both You and every being in the universe is not thereby happier; but he is happy, solely because he knows You.'"[283]

Nevertheless, the sight of the divine essence will not engross the saints so much as to make them forget the external marvels of the visible world, or prevent their relationship with the other elect. In this life, when we concentrate one of our faculties upon an object, our other faculties are left weak and inactive; but the vision of God, far from paralyzing the exercise of our intellectual and sensitive powers, will increase a hundredfold their energy and penetration. Thus God made man saw clearly the divine essence, and yet conversed familiarly with men, sat at their table and freely adopted all the habits of ordinary life. The angels, confirmed in grace, enjoy perfect bliss, and unceasingly see the face of their Father Who is in heaven. Nevertheless, they dispose and co-ordinate the material elements, preside over the movement of the stars, and are not distracted from the presence of God when they lend us their assistance during our pilgrimage, or when they enlighten us with their inspirations.[284]

Furthermore, it is of faith that there is no perceptible space of time between the moment of death and that of the fulfilment of the judgment, and the very second when the just soul is freed from the ties of his body, he is admitted into the heavenly reward, just as, at the same moment, the damned soul is led to the place of his eternal torments.[285]

[283] Omnis autem cognitio qua intellectus creatus perficitur, ordinatur sicut ad finem ad Dei cognitionem; unde videns Deum per essentiam, etiam si nihil aliud cognosceret, perfectum intellectum haberet; nec est perfectior ex hoc quod aliquis aliud cum ipso cognoscat nisi quatenus ipsum plenius videt, unde Augustinus in suis Confessionibus (5): Infelix homo, qui scit illa omnia (scilicet creata), te autem nescit; beatus autem qui te scit, etiam si illa nesciat. Qui vero te et illa novit, non propter illa beatior, sed propter te solum beatus est. (St. Thomas: Summa Theologica, Supplement, Q.92, A.3.

[284] Fr. Blot: Au Ciel On Se Reconnait.

[285] Et in puncto ad inferna descendunt. (Job 21:13) Benedictus XII statuit: Homines pios, plene purgatos vel justos ex hac vita decedentes statim assequi beatitudinem et visione Dei beatifica perfrui. (Benedictus Deus)

Imagine now a man whose inward eye, thoroughly cleansed by divine grace, has never let itself be sullied by the poisoned breath of any passion. This man may have been only an illiterate, uneducated villager, for whom the humble instruction he received obediently from the Church sufficed. He closes his corporeal eyes upon the murky light of this earth and, like a captive who, on coming out of the dark kingdom of shadows, saw, for the first time the golden rays of the daylight star, this man, freed from the ties of his body, is inundated in a strange, dazzling light, he is laid on the threshold of all science and every splendour. All those imperfect images which prevented him from contemplating the truth openly are consumed in the fire of the divine light. The holy obscurities of faith vanish: Heaven, nature and God are enigmas no longer for this king of glory. In the twinkling of an eye, he comprehends both the entirety and every detail of this palace of creation, now his inheritance and domain; with a single glance, he takes in its immensity. He fathoms the properties, secrets and innermost forces of the elements; with a single turn of his thoughts, he visits those huge globes in the firmament, which are so distant that they escape our knowledge and calculations. The tree of knowledge displays the rich collection of its fruits before him, he feeds and quenches his thirst from this ever-luxuriant fountain. He no longer feels any thirst for knowledge, and for him there is no more night, no more doubt, no more curiosity or searching. Oh! with what envy will the wise men of this world, who spend their time devising futile theories and forget God for the sake of indulging in speculation and useless research, then regard the just man who loved God and set his heart on true wisdom!

The smallest reflection of his knowledge will throw into the shade all the discoveries and all the conquests of humanity since the beginning of time.

In this life we would succumb beneath such an abundant flow of light; the economy of our constitution would be destroyed and our vital functions suspended.

Yet this knowledge of created being is less than a drop of water in comparison with a science of a superior order. The spirits of the elect enter into contact with the world of spirits; they see the beauty of the blessed souls, illuminated by the divine likeness, adorned with charity and its attendant virtues, as with a nuptial robe; they see the cherubim, inflamed with their ardent love, the principalities and the dominations with their strength, and the seraphim, arrayed with immaterial wings with which they veil themselves in the presence of the majesty of the Lamb; unaided by sounds and audible words, they engage in ineffable conversation with them. Their luminous, subtle and impassible bodies offer no obstacle to the activity of the intellect and the exercise of their faculties.[286]

[286] Pure spirits have a language which, although not audible or corporeal, is nonetheless quite intelligible; it occurs when an act of their will directs their thought towards him to whom they wish to make it known. Thus, they can speak to one without speaking to others, and without being heard or understood by all. Angelic language seems to be quite simply transmission of a thought, by an act of will, towards some other spirit, who then alone has knowledge of it. (Petau: De Angelis, book 1, chapter XII, nos.7 and 11)

Then we shall understand You, hidden mystery of the Incarnation; and we shall see clearly how the divine nature, substantially united to human nature in the person of the Word, has crowned the latter with the fullness of its prerogatives and splendours, and exalted Him above all the angels and hierarchies. Then, O Virgin Mary, your august Motherhood will no longer be incomprehensible to us, and, together with the choirs of angels, we shall proclaim you blessed, and render thanks for the treasures of sanctification of your Immaculate Heart.

How sweet it will be to contemplate at a single glance all the marvels of the Most High God in the realm of nature as well as in the order of grace and glory! Then will it be that the elect, in their raptures, will unite in song and cry out in chorus: How wonderful Thou art in Thy works, O my God! Now, the universe has become a temple, where the excellence and sublimity of Thy Name are traced out in imposing and indelible characters. Benediction, honour, wisdom and strength to our God, for ever and ever!

Heaven is the repose of man's intellect, the repose of his will and affections.

We shall love God, we said, with that love which He has for Himself. Yet, what often appals us in this life, what makes us reject Heaven with a sort of repugnance and anguish, is that we imagine that in that abode all the natural attachments of our heart will be, as it were, annihilated and invincibly extinguished by the conquering exuberance of the love in which we shall be enflamed for the Creator. Oh! the whole of Christianity protests against this error. How could the religion of Jesus Christ, which condemns so severely our thanklessness, selfishness and insensitivity, set the extinction of all noble and lawful friendships as the condition of our heavenly awards? How could the natural love of husband and wife, father and son, to which God obliges us in this life, be excluded from the constituents of our eternal crown? Will that Church of Heaven, wherein all our feelings will be purified and all our natural tendencies and aspirations will be raised to the most superhuman degree of perfection, be founded upon the ruin of all the ties of the heart, all our memories and family relationships? God forbid!

What we teach as certain is that in Heaven we shall see and recognize one another. Such is the testimony and the constant voice of tradition. In Africa St. Cyprian, who was born in heathendom and, after his conversion, raised to the see of Carthage, feeling that he was destined to die a martyr, exhorted the faithful to face death undaunted like him, and spoke to them of it as a gift and a blessing from Heaven. "Let us then hasten," he said, "and run to see our fatherland, and greet our brethren, for we are awaited by a large number of people who are dear to us; we are desired by a multitude of relatives, brothers and children, who, assured henceforth of their immortality, are still solicitous for our salvation. Let us go to see them, let us go to embrace them... And what joy for all of us, for them and for me!" Among the Greeks at Constantinople, St. Theodore of Studium, an illustrious confessor of the Faith, often consoled bereaved families. He wrote to a father whose sons were all dead: "Your children are not lost, but remain safe and sound for you and as soon as you have reached the end of this temporal life you will see them again, full of joy and gladness." He wrote to a man who had just lost his wife: "You have sent a most worthy spouse before you, into the presence of

God. What should you seek now? You should try to meet her again in Heaven, at the time desired by Providence..." "Without doubt, in Heaven the spouses who have come from earth will themselves be like angels, and will no longer aspire to the delights of the senses."[287] "However, they will taste the ever-pure pleasures of the spirit, and, as they were one in flesh during their earthly exile, so in glory they will form one single heart and soul, in the delights of another union which will have no end."[288]

In Heaven, we shall see and recognize one another; and we shall love one another.

It is true that, in this happy abode, faith will disappear amidst the splendour of the great realities; that the inhabitants of the celestial Jerusalem, in possession of their final end, will no longer require to be sustained by the wings of hope. But charity, in its full development, will shine forth like a great queen, in its power and in all its perfection.[289] All the objects and causes which captivate our hearts and arouse love in this world will act with an intensity a thousand times greater, and without encountering any obstacle, on the hearts of the elect. Thus, in this life, our hearts are fascinated by beauty, by outstanding qualities of mind and heart; the intensity of the feeling which urges us to unite ourselves with a beloved one lessens when we discover his defects and faults. In Heaven, however, we shall find our friends spotless, and their features will be more radiant than the clearest sky; they will be endowed with a gracefulness and charm which will perforce attract our hearts for ever. In this life, love is still the consequence of gratitude, and our hearts glow at the memory of benefits and services rendered. It is only in Heaven that we shall recognize the extent and the cost of the graces of every kind which our benefactors have showered upon us. Then the child will read all the treasures of grace, solicitude and tenderness enclosed in the heart of his mother. He will know that, next to God, it was the tears, prayers and sighs of that mother which brought about his salvation. "O mother," he will exclaim, "I used to love you because you gave me an earthly life, and provided for my food and my childhood needs; now I love you a thousand times more tenderly, because of the eternal life which I have received, and without which the first would have been a fatal gift, a source of calamities and torture for me." O new and happy Monicas, how great your triumphs and joys will be, when you see yourselves surrounded by a whole circle of children whose glory you have secured after having brought them into existence! Then, Christian fathers, your sacrifices, courage and heroic constancy in strengthening your sons by profitable examples, and in rearing them by noble, laborious training, will no longer be unknown. Then,

[287] In resurrectione enim neque nubent, neque nubentur, sed erunt sicut angeli Dei. (Matthew 22:30)

[288] Rev. Fr. Blot: Au Ciel On Se Reconnait (Fourth letter).

[289] Charitas numquam excidit. (1 Corrinthians 13:8) Nunc autem manent fides, spes, charitas, tria haec, major autem horum est charitas. (1 Corinthians 13:13)

O friend, the story will be told of your zeal, your pious artifices to detach a friend from vice and irreligion, and to catch unawares a soul, the object of your holy yearning, by means of innocuous allurements. Then we shall bless you, we shall rekindle the vividness of our memories with outpourings of love, we shall redeem the debt of our hearts in eternal thanksgiving. Lastly, the love aroused in our hearts by the memory of favours received, or the congenial attraction of natural qualities, is usually sustained and renewed by familiarity and the mutual exchange of impressions and thoughts. How, then, shall I describe the ineffable intercourse in which the elect will open their hearts to one another, that fraternal, intimate conversation in which, at every moment, in their celestial language they will convey to each other the captivating emotions of their hearts? In this life, when we hear the conversation of superior minds which have been matured and trained by experience and deep reflection, we lose the sense of time under the spell and fascination of their words. We sit in front of the fire during the long winter evenings, with the snow falling and the wind blowing and roaring, and listen expectantly and with rapt, unflagging attention to the seaman back from distant shores, or the warrior who tells us about the perils of a long siege and the thousand pictures of death which he encountered amidst the fortunes of war. How much greater will be our fascination, as we sit at the great hearth of our heavenly Father, listening while our brothers tell us the story of their seductive and manifold temptations and of the assaults waged by Hell over which they triumphed. We shall not tire of hearing about those victories won in the sight of God alone, more glorious than those of conquerors; those battles waged in silence against the failings of the flesh and the turmoil of one's own thoughts. We shall admire their efforts and their heroic generosity. We shall know about the twists and turns and uncertainties whereby the grace of the Spirit of God, through a strong but gentle impulse, led them to the harbour of repose, and turned even their deviations and falls to account, in the edification of their incorruptible crown. Ah! These will be inexhaustible subjects of conversation, which will never lose their interest and fascination.[290]

[290] Will the damnation of a multitude of souls, once united to the elect by friendship or blood, not cloud the joys of their bliss? Or else must we say that the souls, consumed with charity, will hate the reprobate with an everlasting hatred? Let us listen to the doctrine of St. Thomas on this point: "It is possible," he says, "to rejoice at a thing in two ways: to rejoice at the thing absolutely and inasmuch as it is considered in itself. Now the elect will not rejoice at the sufferings of the damned in that way. But it is also possible to rejoice at the same thing by reason of its accompanying circumstances. From this point of view the elect will rejoice at the pains of the reprobate, in consideration of the order and effects of God's justice in them; and, at the same time, they will rejoice at having themselves been spared the punishments of hell." (St. Thomas: Summa Theologica, Supplement, Q.94, A.3) Furthermore, is not God's love infinitely perfect? He too, then, should be unhappy at the sight of the damned. So, is the knowledge that the demons will be eternally unhappy something that can be expected to dampen the joy of a St. Paul, a St. John or a St. Theresa?

It is true that the glory and bliss of the elect will be apportioned according to their merit, and that they will differ in beauty and greatness as the stars in the sky are themselves different in size and brightness.[291] Nevertheless, union, peace and concord will not reign any the less among this countless array, in which the lesser ranks co-operate with the highest in the repose and harmony of all. The elect will form but one heart among themselves. Their one link will no longer be force or self-interest, but charity. Forming a single body, the head of which is Jesus Christ, and having become living stones of the one building, they will all share in the conquest with the same joy and the same love. Each will be rich in the richness of all, each will thrill in the happiness of all. Just as the creation of a new sun would double the fires which burn the air, so each new sun in the city of God will increase the measure of our own bliss, with all its happiness and glory. Again, just as mirrors, placed opposite one another, are not impoverished by the mutual reflection of their rays, but, rather, the images are multiplied and each of the mirrors reflects, in its own ambit, the light and the objects portrayed in the ambit of all - so, in the same way each of the elect will reflect the rays of his brightness upon all the others. The apostle will reflect upon the angel the grace of preaching which he received, and the angel will reflect upon the apostle his knowledge and the treasures of his keener insights. The prophet will reflect the grace of his visions upon the martyr, and the martyr will crown the prophet with his palms and trophies. The immaculate beauty and grace of the virgin will be reflected on the faces of the penitent and the anchorite ravaged and wasted by fasts and macerations, and the converted sinner will manifest more strikingly the merit and prerogatives of innocence preserved in its integrity.

There will no longer be any place for rivalry or envy. Each of the elect will receive the complement of his personal good from the good of his brethren. We shall read their souls as clearly as our own. On this point, St. Augustine exclaims: "O happy Heaven, where there will be as many paradises as citizens, where glory will come to us by as many channels as there are hearts to show us their concern and affection, where we shall possess as many kingdoms as there are monarchs sharing in our rewards. Quot socii, tot gaudia!"

Such are the joys of Heaven. Let us say that they are pure joys. In Heaven, sin is for ever excluded. The elect are no longer capable of committing the least shadow of a fault or imperfection. In Holy Scripture, eternal life is called indefectible, incorruptible - aeterna, immarcessibilis, incorruptibile. These terms would be incorrect if the saints could fall from grace, and this prospect alone would suffice to diminish their happiness.[292]

[291] In domo Patris, multae mansiones sunt. (John 14:2) Alia claritas solis, alia claritas lunae, et alia claritas stellarum. Stella enim a stella differt in claritate; sic in resurrectione mortuorum. (1 Corinthians 15:14)

[292] Firmissime tene et nullatenus dubites, omnem creaturam mutabilem a Deo immutabili factam, nec tamen jam posse quemlibet sanctorum in deterius mutari quia sic acceperunt beatitudinem, qua Deo stabiliter fruantur, ut ea carere non possint: (Fulgentius: De Fide ad Patrum, no.64)

In our mortal condition it seldom happens that our purest and holiest joys do not contain a mixture of conceit and selfish satisfaction. The soul which feels happy withdraws into itself for its greater enjoyment: it experiences a keener and more concentrated sense of life; to a greater or lesser extent, it seeks relaxation from the thought of God, by which alone it ought to be possessed and filled. For this reason the saints felt a kind of anxiety and unease amidst prosperity. They knew that, in this life, the most honourable pleasures and the sweetest and most lawful joys have always something debilitating and corrupting for the Christian soul. However in Heaven, the bliss of glory, far from rendering souls more human, elevates them and makes them more spiritual. Their awareness of happiness is not distinct from their awareness of God. The harmonies which charm their ears, the lights which bathe their eyes, the aromas which their enchanted nostrils inhale are naught but the power of God rendering itself perceptible to their senses. And the effect of this multifarious delight is not to induce them, by reflection, to withdraw into excessive preoccupation with themselves and the baser perfection of their nature, but rather to inspire them to soar upwards with inexhaustible energy and lose themselves in the ever closer embrace of God who imbues them with His fullness through all their senses and penetrates every pore of their being. On their lips the cry of joy blends with the cry of adoration and gratitude. They do not say, like the carnal disciples, "It is good for us to be here: bonum est hic nos esse"; but exclaim: "Holy, holy, holy is God Almighty." Strange to say, Heaven is somehow the opposite of earth! Here below, man is restored and bathed anew in dignity and moral value through suffering. In Heaven it is the reverse: he is perfected and deified by the flood of delights wherein he is immersed.

The joys of Heaven are joys which are pure and lasting.

Imagine a man on earth, like Solomon whose every wish was satisfied. He has fortune, youth and health; his heart finds contentment and repose in the presence and company of visible creatures whom he loves. All mannner of fascinations combine to complete this man's happiness. Yet there are times when his soul is plunged in sorrow and stricken by fear. He says to himself: My happiness is ephemeral. Each day that passes removes a piece of it, and soon it will be no more.

In Heaven, happiness is stable, since the elect, confirmed in glory, are beyond all fear. The ages will succeed one another without diminishing their happiness, and without a single line creasing their brows. The certainty of eternally possessing the benefits which they hold dear multiplies their sweetness a hundredfold. What a source of jubilation when, after thousands of centuries have elapsed, they reflect upon the day in the distant past when they made their triumphant ascent, and say: Nothing is finished yet, I reign today, today I am in possession of my happiness, and I shall possess it as long as God remains God - for ever and ever!

The joys of Heaven are continuous, not following one after the other so that those which have passed are lost.

The elect in Heaven are no longer prisoners of time. Their new life does not slip by in measurable hours. For them there is no more past or future; but, living the life of God, they are fixed in a perpetual present. On this earth our joys are successive: the pleasures and impressions that we felt yesterday are not those that we feel today. Happiness comes in driblets. It is not given to any man to gather together a day's joys in an instant,

much less those of a lifetime. In Heaven, however, God does not portion Himself out: He commits Himself completely, in the immutable, indivisible simplicity of His essence. From the first moment of their incorporation into the divine life, the bliss of the saints is perfect and consummated. As the future does not diminish it in any way, so they do not long for anything from the past. Illuminated by the infinite clarity of the word of God, they see the events which will be accomplished in a thousand years as clearly as those which were fulfilled a thousand centuries ago. Every moment, says St. Augustine, they experience, as it were, a feeling of infinite joy. Every moment, as far as it is permitted to created beings, they absorb the power of divine virtue. Every moment, eternity makes them feel the accumulated weight of its intoxications, its delights and its glories. Deus totus simul delectat, Deus erit memoriae plenitudo aeternitatis.

One day, St. Augustine was describing the marvels of the city of God to his people of Hippo. He did so with a voice charged with emotion, with that golden eloquence, nurtured at the fount of Scripture, which made it seem that an angel was speaking, not an inhabitant of the earth. The assembled people were deeply moved and captivated, and felt as if transported to those feasts of eternity of which such a striking picture was being drawn for them, having a kind of vision of that day when the Lord would adorn the brows of the faithful with an imperishable laurel. Suddenly, their emotion was so great that they broke into groans and cries of wonder, and tears flowed from every eye. The respect due to the majesty of the sacred precints and the silence imposed by the presence of the speaker were forgotten, and each one invoked the day when, far from all affliction, he would drink abundantly of the waters of truth and life. Each trembled lest, overcome by his frailty or led astray by seductions, he might be deprived of the blessed vision. From all sides of the holy place rang out the words: O beautiful Heaven, when shall I see you? Shall I be so senseless as to prefer the pleasures and fortune of a day to you? Who would not consent to purchase you at the price of the heaviest sacrifices and labours? Interrupted by these exclamations and sighs, and surprised at the effect produced by his words, Augustine was no less moved than the multitude. He wanted to proceed, to continue with the portrait of the heavenly Jerusalem which he had begun; but the sobbing of his listeners and of his own emotion stifled his voice; and his tears, mingling with those of his people, formed, as it were, a torrent of mourning for the sorrows of exile and the remoteness of the beloved fatherland.

O holy pontiff, how I yearn to have the pathos of your voice on my lips! O golden age of the early Church, when the lure of invisible goods and the promises of the future life exerted such a lively impression upon souls - who will bring you back to us again? If our words have not the power to open the fount of tears, may the hope and the memory of you, O city of God, at least raise up our desires; may they restrain our gross aspirations and act as a counter-weight to them and to the pull of the thousand inferior desires which corrupt us! Ah! we love power and glory, we would like to be present and give orders everywhere: why, then, turn away from the nobility of our destiny and abandon the immortal empire which God prepares for us? We love pleasure and joy; we recognize that life is unbearable if affections and joys do not mitigate its misfortunes and bitterness. Why, then, spurn the only real happiness, and desire the source of all

pleasure and joy to dry up for us along with the present life? Let men whose every hope is directed towards the things of the earth seek from nature the unlimited donation of its gifts; let them seek their pleasures and glories in the unrestricted perfecting of material things; let them consider themselves happy because a thousand hands are at work to serve them, and a thousand machines and instruments are in operation to interpret and fulfil their ideas and whims. "These goods diminish," says St. Gregory the Great, "these objects lose their illusion and become contemptible, when we consider the nature and immensity of the rewards that are promised us. Earthly goods, measured against the bliss above, no longer seem an advantage, but rather a burden and a painful tyranny. Temporal life, in comparison with eternal life, deserves not to be called life, but death."[293] On the other hand, to live in the heavenly city, mingled with the choirs of angels, to be surrounded by a light which is not itself circumscribed, and to possess a spiritual, incorruptible flesh, is not infirmity, but royalty and life abundant.

Ah, if our mind is stirred at the thought of so much richness and magnificence, and aspires to fly towards those places where happiness has no bounds, let us remember that great rewards are acquired only by great combats, and that no one shall be crowned who has not fought the good fight.[294]

Let us, then, rejoice with the prophet at the things that have been said to us: I shall go into the house of the Lord. Laetatus sum in his quae dicta sunt mihi, in domum Domini ibimus; but may our hearts not become attached to the snare of tangible things, and may our feet be always standing in the expectation of your heavenly courts, O Jerusalem: stantes erant pedes nostri in atriis tuis Jerusalem.[295] Jerusalem, which is built as a city, when shall we witness your stately ceremonies, when shall we be reunited to that corner-stone, which is the foundation, the strength and the pivot of our building? Jerusalem quae aedificatur ut civitas. Already countless tribes, legions of apostles, prophets, martyrs and virgins, just men of every state and rank, have crossed the court of your domain. How desirable their fate is, for they are freed from our temptations, our perplexities and our wretchedness! Illuc enim ascenderunt tribus, tribus Domini. Seated on thrones which they have themselves erected, they have built upon truth and justice. Faithful and devoted to their Master unto death, they have deserved to share with Him the inheritance of the house of David. Quia illic sederunt, sedes in judicio, sedes super domum David. This is the sole ambition that we are permitted. Everything that is not Jerusalem is unfit for us. Let us ask only for the goods and the peace which it contains: Rogate quae ad pacem sunt Jerusalem. Let us think only of Heaven, let us seek only Heaven, let us store up only for

[293] Pope St. Gregory the Great: Homilia 37 in Evangelia.

[294] Non coronatur nisi qui legitime certaverit. (2 Timothy 2:5)

[295] Psalm 121:1,2.

Heaven, and let us live only for Heaven. Propter Domum Domini Dei nostri quaesivi bona tibi. A few moments longer, and all that must end will be no more; a few more efforts, and we shall be at the close; a few more combats, and we shall attain the crown; a few more sacrifices, and we shall be in Jerusalem, where love is always new, and where there will be no other sacrifice but praise and joy. Amen.

EIGHTH CONFERENCE

The means of redemption: Christian sacrifice.

Caro mea vere est cibus, et
sanguis meus vere est potus.

For my flesh is meat indeed;
and my blood is drink indeed. (John 6:56)

Our heart is an altar. On this altar lies the victim: our evil inclinations. The sword destined to slay this victim is the spirit of sacrifice and immolation; the sacred fire which must burn night and day on the altar of our heart is the love of Jesus Christ; the fruitful, invigorating breath which inspires and nourishes this sacred fire of love is the Eucharist.

The Eucharist is a sacrament of the living. As a sacrament of the living, it bestows supernatural life and sanctifying grace. Apart from this property, which it shares with the other sacraments, the Eucharist has a special virtue of its own, expressed in the words of Christ, "My flesh is meat indeed; and My blood is drink indeed," words which the Council of Trent explains thus: "All the effects which food produces materially in our bodies, the Eucharist produces spiritually in our souls." Thus, food strengthens our bodies and, up to a given age, makes them grow; the Eucharist gives strength against temptations, and makes the soul grow in virtue and justice. The richer the material food, and the more discriminating the palate and the sense of taste, the more delicious it is; the purer the heart, and the better prepared the mind, the sweeter the Eucharist. It is through the Eucharist that the God of glory inaugurates His bliss in the midst of our wretchedness; it is the source of all fidelity, greatness and holiness.

The Eucharist has a double foundation. It is, first of all, one of the seven sacraments of the New Law, in which Jesus Christ, present under the species of bread and wine, is offered for our adoration and offers Himself as food. It is, in addition, a sacrifice, in which the spotless Lamb renews the memory of His passion and death and is truly immolated. As this conference is linked to the preceding ones, we shall deal with the Eucharist only insofar as it constitutes the sacrifice of the New Law.

In order, from this point of view, to set out the true nature of the eucharistic oblation, its excellence and efficacity, it is essential to define sacrifice in general, and to explain what it really is.

I

Sacrifice is a solemn, public act, the purpose of which is to honour the being of God.

St. Thomas defines sacrifice as an external, public and solemn action, performed through the ministry of a specially selected man, with the object of offering to the Most High God something animate or material, but in such a way that this thing, destroyed and transformed, is set apart for the worship and honour of God.[296]

It follows from this definition, first, that sacrifice is the essence, the central point, of worship, and the appropriate expression of the relationship between God and man. On this account sacrifice is offered in the name of the whole people. It is in no way a private act which any individual can perform as he pleases; it can be offered only by men specially chosen and consecrated, either because these men have received investiture directly and immediately from God, or because the lawful leaders of religious and civil society have appointed them for this purpose.[297] Nec quisquam sumit sibi honorem, sed qui vocatur a Deo tamquam Aaron - Nor does anyone assume honour to himself but he who is called by God like Aaron. Elsewhere, St. Paul says: "Omnis Pontifex, ex hominibus assumptus, pro hominibus constituitur in iis quae sunt ad Deum - In relation to the things of God, every high priest raised up from among men is placed in that position on behalf of men." Thus, under the law of nature the head of the family was pontiff and king; under the Mosaic law the tribe of Aaron alone had the right to celebrate at the altar; under the law of grace none but validly ordained bishops and priests may celebrate and consecrate the body of Jesus Christ.

Secondly, sacrifice consists in the oblation of an external, tangible and permanent thing.

Hence the offering which man makes to God of his desires and affections, the rites and ceremonies, such as prostrations and expiatory acts, observed in diverse religions, are called sacrifices only by analogy and extension. For sacrifice to take place, the object offered must be destroyed, or, at least, it must undergo a change or modification, which makes it inapt for any profane use and assigns it solely to the honour and worship of God.

It follows that this destruction or modification, which constitutes the very essence of sacrifice, could not be applied to the interior or exterior acts of man, which are of their nature accidental and transitory. It is essential that the matter of sacrifice should be something extraneous to man and subsisting in itself, for sacrifice is based upon the principle of substitution. In ancient times, if man offered an animal in place of himself, this animal was killed; if it was flour or bread, the flour and bread were cooked and consumed; if it was a liquid, the liquid was poured out as a libation.

[296] Sacrificium proprie dictum est externa et sensibilis actio, qua res aliqua ita Deo offertur, ut legitimo ac solemni ritu in Dei honorem et cultum aliquo modo immutetur a publico et legitimo ministro. (Suarez: Quaestio LXXXIII)

[297] Solum illud est proprie legitimum sacrificium quod publica vel privata auctoritate institutum est. Quia ut homines in unum corpus reipublicae debito modo congregentur, necesse est ut etiam in unum nomen religionis conveniant; id autem fieri non potest, nisi in usu sacrificiorum etiam conveniant, sed neque id fieri potest, nisi illa sint publica, et communi autoritate instituta. (Suarez: id., p.640)

Thirdly, it follows from St. Thomas's definition that sacrifice has this in common with the sacrament, that, like the latter, it is an external and visible sign, intended to express and effect a sacred thing. Yet it differs from the sacrament in this sense, that the sacrament has as its immediate effect the sanctification of man and the transmission of certain graces or supernatural aptitudes, following a given order, whereas sacrifice has as its immediate object the honour due to the divine majesty, and the acknowledgement of His infinite sovereignty.

Man, formed of a body and soul, is bound to honour God by rendering Him homage for all his external goods. Thus, at all times and in all places, men have felt unable to render God a more expressive and forceful sign of their adoration and gratitude than by destroying or modifying, for the sake of His glory, one of the rarest and most useful objects in their lives. They have constantly had recourse to this means in order to show the Most High God that they were subject to His power, and that they recognized Him as the absolute Author of life and death.

For this reason it was ordained in the Old Testament that the sacrificing priest should extend and cross his hands over the victim before striking it. The purpose of this ceremony was to show that, not having the right to destroy himself, man identified himself with the victim and, insofar as it lay in his power, destroyed himself, not in reality, but by way of representation and image. Hence he fed on the flesh of the victim in order to express the wish that the sacrifice might become inherent and in some way embodied in him; for as St. Thomas says: "Exterius sacrificium signum est interioris sacrificii - Exterior sacrifice is the sign of interior sacrifice."

From these considerations it follows that sacrifice, taken in itself, includes a cult of adoration and latria, and can be offered only to the one, supreme God.

It is a fact worthy of note that, in the days of paganism and amongst idolatrous peoples, the devils have constantly shown an appetite for sacrifices, convinced that by having such honours paid to them they were conferring upon themselves, by this very fact, the rank and honours due to the true God. Daemones enim, non cadaverinis nidoribus, sed divinis honoribus gaudent - For it is not the smell of burning corpses but the divine honours associated with them that makes the demons rejoice."[298]

Without sacrifice man cannot honour God as he ought; there is no more powerful means of obtaining His mercy, mitigating His justice and giving prayer its full efficacy.

In the Old Law sacrifices had only an imperfect, figurative value.

Indeed, what could the offering of rams and heifers have been worth, in the sight of the Master of all things? And even had the most High God deigned to accept sacrifices so unworthy of His glory, what hands would have been pure enough to offer them to Him? That is why the Prophet said: "Sacrificium et oblationem noluisti - Sacrifice and oblation thou didst not desire" and elsewhere: "Holocaustis non delectaberis - With burnt offerings thou wilt not be delighted."[299]

[298] St. Augustine: 10, De Civitate Dei, cap.XIX.

[299] Psalm 39:7 and Psalm 50:18.

Thus, once the sacrifice of the Cross - that oblation, infinite in itself and more than superabundant in its application and its effects - had been offered on Calvary, blood-sacrifices immediately ceased over the whole surface of the earth. They are not found either amongst the Jews or the Mohammedans. They are no longer practised, except by peoples beyond the pale of civilization and history. A priest who appeared in our times with a knife in his hand and exuding the smell of immolated meats would provoke laughter and disgust.

The Eucharist is a perfect sacrifice. In it are manifested strikingly all the attributes of God: His wisdom, His omnipotence and His mercy. The Eucharist is salutary in its fruits: for how could every virtue not spring forth from the wounds of the Man-God, and from the chalice of His blood? It is worthy of the sovereign majesty: it is, in fact, the very person of the Word, who annihilates Himself in order to give to His Father a glory proportionate to His sovereign perfection. The Eucharist fulfils all the conditions necessary for a perfect, consummated sacrifice.

There is, first, a principal priest, who is Jesus Christ; the secondary priest is the minister specially consecrated for this purpose. There is a victim offered, who is, again, none other than Jesus Christ, hidden under the species of bread and wine. There is the most High God, to Whom this victim is offered. In truth the oblation is offered equally to Jesus Christ, not only as God, but also as man. Jesus Christ is a victim, offered and immolated, according to the words of St. Andrew: "Immaculatum agnum quotidie in altari sacrifico - I sacrifice the divine Lamb on the altar each day." In the Eucharist there is a <u>subject</u>, for whose benefit the victim is offered; this subject is the Church and the faithful, "qui pro vobis et pro multis effundetur." As St Thomas observes, the excellence of the sacrifice is superior to that of the sacrament. The sacrament benefits only the person to whom it is administered; the sacrifice is salutary to all. Lastly, at Mass there is an altar: "Quid est altare, nisi sedes corporis et sanguinis Domini."[300] The sacrificial act and the sense of the mystery are efficaciously expressed by the offering, the consecration and the consumption of the sacred species. Let us add that it is part of the excellence and dignity of the sacrifice that man offers to God the best of what he has. Abel offered his first-fruits; the Patriarchs spotless lambs and heifers. Now, what is better than Him by whom all things were done, and Who is Himself the author and source of all good?

How ardent our piety and our transports of love and gratitude would have been, if we had been present at the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ - if, in the company of St. John and the holy women, it had been given to us to gaze upon the wounds of the Man-God and receive the first-fruits of that divine blood, offered for our redemption!

Now, the Council of Trent says that the sacrifice of the Mass has the same value as the sacrifice of the Cross: "Tantum valet sacrificium missae, quantum oblatio Christi in cruce." It is the same priest who offers, the same victim who is offered and the same immolation that is renewed. "In divino sacrificio, quod in missa peragitur, idem ille Christus continetur et incruente immolatur - In the divine sacrifice performed in the Mass, the self-same Christ is present and is immolated in a bloodless manner."[301]

[300] S. Optatus liber VI, <u>Contra</u> <u>Parmenianum</u>

[301] Council of Trent: session 22, Chapter 11.

First, at the altar and at the Cross it is the same priest who offers. The sacred ministers who appear clothed in priestly garments are only the delegates and ministers of Jesus Christ, the principal and eternal priest, according to the order of Melchisedech.[302]

In other words we have, at the altar, a representative function; we assume the person of Jesus Christ, and we assume it in many ways, multifarium et multis modis, in our vestments, in the mysteries that we enact, and in the words that we utter.[303]

At Mass, we come out of the sacristy wearing on our shoulders that mysterious chasuble, the image of the Cross which Our Lord Jesus Christ bore upon His own shoulders. The alb which covers us represents the white robe in which the Son of God was mocked at the court of Herod, but which His innocence transformed into a garment of dazzling brightness. We carry, hanging from our arms, that maniple of tears, intended to wipe away the sweat from our foreheads and restore us from our failings. After bowing, we ascend the steps of the altar, as Our Lord Jesus Christ climbed the steps of Golgotha. We raise our hands, when we say "oremus", as Jesus Christ prayed, with His hands raised towards His Father. At the Canon we speak in a low voice, like Jesus Christ Who, in the Garden of Olives, moved a stone's throw away from His disciples, in order to enter into the silence of recollection and prayer. At the Elevation we take the Host in our hands, just as Jesus Christ, at the Last Supper, took the bread and wine into His holy and venerable hands. Then our words cease, our personality disappears, and the voice of Jesus Christ replaces that of His minister. It is no longer we who speak, no longer we who live: the body of the priest has become the very body of God. Leaning over the Host, we do not say "This is the body of Jesus Christ, this the blood of Jesus Christ," but "This is my body, this is my blood."

"A great mystery and a sublime dignity is that of the priest, to whom is given a power which the angels do not have. Priests alone, properly ordained, have the power to celebrate and consecrate the body of Jesus Christ."[304]

"Priests of the Lord," exclaimed St. John Chrysostom "the greatest things among men seem to me shorn of all glory, when I consider that which you have received. Your ministry, it is true, is performed among men; but it ranks among the celestial hierarchies, for the Paraclete is the Author of the mysteries which you accomplish; you are great-

[302] Non sunt veluti principales sacerdotes per se offerentes, sed sunt ministri et instrumenta Christi qui est principalis et aeternus sacerdos secundum ordinem Melchisedech. (Suarez: Disputationes LXXXVI)

[303] At the altar, the priest who offers is Jesus Christ. It does not follow that the officiating priests are merely mechanical, inferior agents; they offer authentically, by themselves, not as instruments, but as instrumental causes.

[304] Grande mysterium et magna dignitas sacerdotum, quibus datum est quod non est angelis concessum: soli sacerdotes in Ecclesia rite ordinati, habent potestatem celebrandi et corpus Christi consecrandi. (Thomas a Kempis: Imitation of Christ: book 4.)

er than the prophet Elias; you bear in your hands, not fire, but the Holy Ghost, beseeching Him to pour forth His graces upon all the faithful." "Priests of the Lord," he adds, "there can be no doubt but that you are greater than kings. The king commands subjects; you command God. The judgements of the king affect only the things of time; your pronouncements will stand through all eternity. You have no need of the bounty and riches of the king, but the king needs your blessings and prayers. There can be no doubt that you are greater than the Thaumaturges: the Thaumaturges work miracles on the elements, you work them on souls. The Thaumaturges operate transformations in matter; you transform the bread and wine every day into the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ. There is no doubt but that, in a sense, you are greater than the Virgin Mary herself. The Virgin Mary, by her assent, brought about the Incarnation of the Word: she uttered that blessed 'fiat', which made the Son of God descend into her immaculate womb. That fiat she pronounced only once; you pronounce it every day. Mary begot Jesus Christ to a mortal life; you beget Him to a life which lasts throughout history. Mary was obeyed by Jesus Christ in His passible state; you are obeyed by Jesus Christ impassible and glorious."

Politics, philosophy and science have tried many times, but they have never been able to create a priest. At the time of the Great Revolution [the French Revolution of 1789], the same men who had defied reason and attempted to replace the Sunday rest by the legal rest of the "decadi" also tried to create a humanitarian priesthood, a priesthood divested of every lustre and trace of divinity. An official delegate of the civil power clothed himself in a white robe; he girded the sash of three colours around his loins, and moved up to the foot of an altar, dedicated to nature, to offer a bunch of flowers, the symbol of patriotism and hope; he succumbed beneath the weight of ridicule and scorn; he did not have the seal of God, that divine ray, that cast of features, something indefinable, which God alone can give to man, and which no royal appointment or any kind of lay selection will ever succeed in bestowing upon him.

It is a noteworthy fact that wherever the eucharistic sacrifice disappears there is no priest. The Protestants have found this. The day when they drove Christ from the tabernacles, where He lies in sacrifice and in goodness, their priests vanished immediately; they had thenceforth only ministers, teachers of morality, police officers in the department of religious affairs, and, as Count de Maistre has wittily said, men clad in black, mounting the pulpit every Sunday, to make decorous speeches.

Such is the reason for the unrelenting hatred of the wicked towards the priest. It is written in the Apocalypse: "And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to be delivered, that, when she should be delivered, he might devour her son."[305] Now the man who delivers Jesus Christ is the priest - parturiente lingua, in the

[305] Et draco stetit ante mulierem quae erat paritura, ut cum peperisset, filium ejus devoraret. (Apocalypse 12:4)

beautiful expression of St. Ambrose. The sure means of suppressing Jesus Christ as far as possible, and of utterly destroying His reign here below, is to get rid of the priest, or at the very least empty his heart of faith, innocence and the Christian virtues. Lately, speaking of the priest, one of the leaders of contemporary impiety said: "Let us not put him to death - he would acquire new strength in blood; martyrdom would be for him the seed of a new fecundity and a super-human strength. Let us suffocate him in filth." But the priest cannot be vanquished. In the face of the words spewed out of blasphemous mouths which call down death and pile up great ruins, the priest conveys on his lips two words of life and eternity: a word of eternity which, each day, brings the living Word of God down upon the altar; a word of eternity which makes Him come down into souls, where He dwells, together with justice and the supernatural works of life.

II

At the altar, as on the Cross, there is a single priest; for the priesthood with which we are invested is nothing more than a sharing in that of Christ.[306] Moreover, there is only one victim.

In the ancient sacrifices the victim appeared disgraced and close to death. It was bound with chains and adorned in funeral wrappings. It was called "sacred", and this term meant both that the victim was dedicated to God and, by contrast, that it was at the same time accursed and execrated. In this sense, it became responsible for all the iniquities of the people and, in a certain sense, was made to bear them. Hence it is that the [French] word "sacre" is used in popular speech as a term both of praise and blessing and, at the same time, as a term of imprecation and blasphemy.

Jesus Christ, inaccessible to our senses, and in His glorious state, is subject neither to death nor to any change; consequently He can no longer make Himself a victim. Yet it is of the essence of sacrifice that the victim should be visible, and that it should be destroyed or changed; and it was once customary that man should be able to feed on it, in order to share in the sanctification it had received.[307] However, Jesus Christ could not offer Himself on the altar with His natural features

[306] Unus tantum est principalis pontifex et sacerdos, cui nullus proprie succedit, quia ipse perpetue durat: reliqui vero solum sunt vicarii ejus et ministri, per quos humano ac sensibili modo, sacerdotalia munera exercet, quia non fuit expediens, ipsum manere inter homines ad illa obeunda. (Suarez: LXXIV, section 2, p.633)

[307] It should be noted that consumption of the victim is not absolutely essential to the reality and perfection of the sacrifice. Thus Communion is a complementary and integral part of the sacrifice of the altar, but not its essence. In the Old Testament, the holocaust was a true sacrifice and, indeed, the most perfect. It was of its essence that man did not feed on it.

and in His human form, and, for this reason, the Jews, interpreting the divine words in a gross, carnal sense, said: "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" Quomodo potest hic nobis carnem suam dare ad manducandum? So, Christ found means of offering Himself in a completely new and incomprehensible manner. He established His eternal priesthood, not according to the order of Aaron, but according to the order of Melchisedech. Just as this mysterious character went to meet the victorious Abraham in order to offer him bread and wine, so Jesus Christ chose bread and wine, not only as the matter, but as the symbol of His new sacrifice. So Jesus Christ does not appear on the altar in His own form and species [appearance], but under the species of bread and wine. "The sacrifice of the Mass is composed of two elements," says St. Augustine: "the visible appearances of the substance destroyed, and Jesus Christ, really present in the integrity of His flesh and blood."

Just as in the ancient sacrifices one part of the victim was destroyed and the other part reserved for the use of men, so at the altar what is destroyed is the material substance of the bread, while what is retained are the accidents, the form of the bread, its fragrance, colour and taste - all the non-substantial qualities of the bread, which remain visible and stable. And just as the substance of the bread literally becomes Jesus Christ, so Jesus Christ, subsisting beneath the mystic veil of the remaining accidents, symbolically becomes bread in accordance with the words "Ego sum panis vivus." By an incomprehensible marvel of His power and love, He makes Himself edible, capable of being changed into our substance, and He is truly our heavenly bread and our daily food. Not less wonderful is the fact that Christ, reduced to the state of a victim, should find the means of instructing us, and of offering us, in His eucharistic life, the example of all the virtues.

In His sacramental life, Jesus Christ shows us a higher, and altogether new, degree of wisdom, a wisdom which values and relishes only what concerns the glory of God and His service, the salvation and sanctification of souls. The spirit which animates Jesus Christ in His sacramental state is a spirit detached from all our human and natural views, far removed from our ways of wordly prudence, which we deem to be far-seeing, because by them we are able so to direct our resources as to accede to honours, manage our fortune and remove the obstacles to our gross, self-seeking ends. The virtues which Christ sets before us are solid virtues, which do not consist of mere desires but are revealed efficaciously by their fruits. Thus He gives us admirable examples of humility. Wholly present in each host, He becomes, as it were, a speck of dust, reduced to the dimensions of a grain of sand[308] in order to confound our vanity and our ambitions

[308] When we say that Christ is reduced to the dimensions of a grain of sand, or a host one inch in diameter, we must not misunderstand these expressions. We are speaking metaphorically, in respect of ourselves, and relatively, in respect of what is perceived by our senses. In actual fact, Jesus Christ is present in His entirety, in each particle of the Host visible to the eye or tangible to the senses. There is absolutely nothing changed with regard to the intrinsic quantity and proportions of His body for, as St. Thomas says: Nec status, nec statura signati minuitur.

and the anxiety of men to make their way in the world. He does not reserve to Himself any means of protecting His dignity, I shall not say against our profanations, but against our forgetfulness, negligence and mishaps. He gives us a heroic example of patience. He endures abandonment, loneliness and disdain. He does not complain of our coldness and indifference. He keeps silent, never betraying His indignation, during centuries of impiety and folly, when sacrilegious hands snatched Him out of His tabernacles and cast Him away, like some foul refuse. He bids us be charitable, begs, intercedes and moves to mercy, restraining the wrath of His Father by showing Him the scars of His wounds; and, to appease Him, He offers up the sacrifice which commemorates the death He underwent for us.

He teaches us poverty, and gives admirable examples of the detachment that we should have in our dealings with creatures. In His eucharistic life Jesus Christ does not value any created object. Whether He is enshrined in a monstrance of precious stones, enclosed in a rich luminary, or placed in a wooden tabernacle or on bare boards, Jesus Christ offers no resistance, and never complains. He is indifferent to all our refinements and splendours: if He accepts our adornments and the homage of our precious objects, it is out of graciousness, and for the sake of acquiescing in the outpourings of our piety. In this way He teaches us to despise all refinements and splendours; to remain indifferent to the goods of the earth, and to accept with the same equanimity honours or obscurity, wealth or poverty. Finally, He gives us examples of chastity. In the Eucharist, Jesus Christ is really and substantially present, but He subsists in the sacramental state, not under His own appearance, but under the appearances of bread and wine. In this respect, and inasmuch as He dwells beneath invisible veils, His senses are incapable of receiving impressions. Our sweet odours do not flatter Him, our symphonies do not entrance Him, and our tangible objects do not enamour Him. He shows us thereby what purity should govern our affections. He wants us, like Himself, to be of flesh, without that flesh being subject to any rebellion; to open our eyes, but without bringing them to rest upon any creature merely out of pleasure and attraction; to breathe in sweet odours, but without ever feeling drawn to any but those of divine love.

What remains to be said? Reigning in the highest heavens, Jesus Christ has found how to annihilate Himself each day, and deliver Himself into the hands of His minister as a servant and captive. Possessing an immortal life, Jesus Christ has found how to undergo the onset of death and decomposition; and the new life which He receives in the sacrament, He loses each time that the Hosts deteriorate and decompose. Subsisting on our altars for nineteen centuries, He descends upon them every day, and every moment some point or other on the earth renews the oblation of His passion and death.

If we paid heed to these teachings, what an admirable life we would lead! Ignorant, illiterate people, with their eyes fixed on this frail Host and their ears attentive to that inner voice which rings out into the depths of the soul, have performed heroic deeds; for their own sanctification and that of others, they have derived the most penetrating insights and acquired more treasures and knowledge than if they had read all the writings of the Doctors and the Saints. We ourselves, with the aid of the

same examples, would become paragons of grace. Truly, our lives are filled with marvels, but will not these marvels one day bring our condemnation? Jesus Christ, on the altar, invites us to offer ourselves as living, holy victims, pleasing to God: Hostiam sanctam, viventem, Deo placentem. He teaches us thereby to humble ourselves in the face of praise, to endure persecution as if we were impassible, and to persevere unshaken in our commitments.

III

At the altar, as on the Cross, there is the same priest and the same victim; there is also the same immolation.

"At the altar," says St. John Chrysostom, "there is a sword." And it is we priests who carry that sword, not in our hands, but on our lips. In point of fact, the immolation does not take place physically, but mystically and by representation. Yet this representation is so vivid and efficacious, that it is equivalent to the reality itself.

According to St. Thomas, Suarez and the great theologians, it is not the Offertory, nor the Communion, but the Consecration which constitutes the essence of the sacrifice.

Indeed, as Mgr. Rosset remarks, Christ did not undergo some ordinary death. He was not carried off by illness, His bones were not torn apart nor did He meet His end by drowning; but He gave His life on the Cross by the shedding and loss of His blood. For this reason the Mass, instituted as the memorial of His sacrifice, must represent His death in the manner in which it was consummated. This can be so only if the body of Christ, by virtue of the sacramental words, is offered on the altar separately from His blood, and His blood in the chalice offered separately from His sacred body.

Hence, if the bread alone were consecrated there would indeed be a representation of the death of Christ but not of His death such as He suffered it. If the wine alone were consecrated, the fact that Christ lay on the Cross deprived of the totality of His blood would not be clearly and formally expressed.[309]

Thus, when the priest says, "This is my body," the body alone is called down upon the altar, and, if the blood, soul and divinity come at the same time, it is, as the theologians say, by mere concomitance, because Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, cannot now die.[310] If Jesus Christ were not in a supernatural and glorious state, the body would be separated from the blood, through the power of the sacramental words. When the priest says, "This is my blood," the blood alone is called down upon the altar, and, if it were not indissolubly and eternally united to the body, it would stream down as formerly, on the Cross. The words, "This is my body, this is my blood," are the sword which probes deep into the very division of soul and spirit. If separation does not actually occur, the reason is not because the sword lacks power, but because it is paralyzed by the state of impassibility with which the glorious body of the Saviour is endowed.

[309] Mgr. Rosset: Tractatus de Eucharistia, p.540.

[310] Christus resurgens ex mortuis non jam moritur.

Mgr. Rosset further remarks that the perfect accomplishment of the sacrifice in no way requires the actual immolation of the victim. It is sufficient that the sacrificial act should be, of its nature, destructive of the thing offered. The Church places among the martyrs St. John the Evangelist, who was cast into boiling oil, and other saints who received wounds or underwent tortures of their nature liable to cause death, even though, owing to a miracle, their death did not take place. In the Old Law, when the sacrificing priest had dealt the victim a mortal wound, the sacrifice was perfect, and the victim was deemed immolated even if it were miraculously saved.

On the Cross and at the altar, Jesus Christ offers His Father the same death. On the Cross, He offers His present death, at the altar His past and consummated death.

On the Cross, He offers Himself as a sacrifice of redemption; at the altar, as a sacrifice deriving from that infinite source of grace which He once poured out on Calvary - on the Cross, in the state of a suffering man; at the altar, in the state of a supernatural, mystical man. As a matter of fact, in order that the sacrifice may be performed, the visible minister must intervene; but his action is accessory, which does not in the least diminish the dignity and price of the sacrifice. This is shown by the fact that the words used by the minister are the same ones that Jesus Christ spoke at the Last Supper.* Sermo autem Christi, non est alius quam verbum consecrationis.[311]

At the altar, we are not Christ in reality, but we are mystically, and we speak in His person: we say and do what Jesus Christ said and did, hoc facite in meam commemorationem. We have the same power; for, as St. Gregory the Great says, what faithful Christian would doubt that, "at the moment of immolation and at the word of the priest, the heavens truly open, and the choirs of angels accompany Jesus Christ in this mystery"?[312] At this moment the Eternal Father fixes His eyes on the offering. He does not in the least consider the person celebrating, but sees only His divine Son. He accepts His offering as supremely propitious and fitting, even if it be offered by the most unworthy and most sullied hands.

The sacrifice of the Mass is supremely propitiatory for the living and for the dead. It is fully sufficient to obtain for us an abundance of grace from above and to satisfy all our needs. Infinite in value and dignity, it is nevertheless limited in its effects and appplication: for the reason that, those whom the sacrifice profits, namely the priest, the faithful and the Church, however

[311] St. Ambrose: <u>On The Psalms</u>, 39.

[312] Quis fidelium habere dubium possit, in ipsa immolationis hora ad sacerdotis voces, coelos aperiri, in illo Jesu Christi mysterio angelorum choros adesse? (St. Gregory the Great: <u>4</u>, <u>Dialogues</u>, 36)

* Note by the publishers of the English edition. Fr. Arminjon's assertion that "the words used by the minister are the same ones that Jesus Christ spoke at the Last Supper" is no longer true of the rite used by the majority of those who call themselves Catholics - the Novus Ordo Missae. Hence it is evident that those who use this rite are not complying with Our Lord's instruction to His ministers.

holy she may be, have only a finite merit and dignity.[313] They are capable of gaining new graces, of attaining a higher degree of perfection, and, in spite of their efforts, it will never be possible for them to exhaust all the fruits deriving from such an oblation. The sacrifice of the Mass is equivalent to that of the Cross; but the sacrifice of the Cross, infinite as it is in value, is unable to bestow an indefinite multitude of merits and satisfactions, to the point where no more can be added.

When He instituted His sacrifice, Jesus Christ fixed the sum and measure of grace which would accrue to those for whom it was applied. Hence it follows that several Masses are more profitable than one only, and that a Mass said specially for the intention of this or that departed soul is more beneficial to him, and contributes more efficaciously to his deliverance, than a Mass celebrated for all Christians in general.

The sacrifice is offered in honour of the martyrs and saints who are in Heaven. We ask God that they may be more and more glorified by the faithful of the Church Militant, and that the intercession and homage which we render them may obtain for them an increase in accidental joy.[314]

The sacrifice benefits the living, in order to obtain for them the grace of God, and repentance and remission of the punishments due to their sins. "Hujus quippe oblatione placatur Dominus, et gratiam et donum poenitentiae concedens, crimina et peccata etiam ingentia dimittit." [315]

Of all intercessory acts, sacrifice is the most propitiatory for the dead. Prayer, alms-giving and works of charity contribute to the deliverance or relief of the dead only by reason of the fervour and disposition of the person offering them. They are works which, in theological language, obtain benefit ex opere operantis,[316] but

[313] Sacrificium missae non potest producere effectum infinitum. Sed nihilominus, valor ejus in se consideratus est intensive infinitus; sicut infinita est virtus creatrix dei, esti creatura non sit capax infinitae perfectionis... Missae sacrificium nunquam operatur effectum infinitum in hominibus, quia non potest in illis tot merita et satisfactiones producere, ut non polleant amplius producere. (Rosset: De Eucharistia, p.577)

[314] Si quis dixerit imposturam esse, celebrare in honorem sanctorum, et pro illorum intercessione apud Deum obtinenda, sicut Ecclesia intendit, anathema sit. (Council of Trent: session 22, ch.3)

[315] Council of Trent: session 22, ch.2.

[316] A sacrament or any religious rite is said to work "ex opere operantis" when its efficacy is not certain or absolute but depends, mainly or partly, upon the merits and the degree of holiness of the person who performs it. A liturgical rite or a sacrament is said to work "ex operato" when its efficacy is certain and absolute, independent of the minister who confers it or of the subject who receives it, and acts directly, by virtue of its institution. Hence, the sacrifice of the Mass, and all the sacraments of the New Law, work "ex opere operato." The sacrifices and sacraments of the Old Law, as well as the sacramentals used by the Church, such as prayers, signs of the Cross and sprinkling with holy water, have an effect only "ex opere operantis."

the sacrifice of the Mass is independent of the merits or demerits of the person who offers it. It is efficacious directly, and by the mere virtue of its institution, ex opere operato. It is a remedy the more precious because, with regard to the souls in Purgatory, the Church possesses no other which has an infallible and certain effect. The Church cannot make the faithful departed share in her sacraments, for a sacrament is an external sign, perceptible to the senses, which sanctifies only through the intermediary of the body. Consequently, separated souls, deprived of their senses and their earthly wrapping, are no longer capable of receiving its fruits. The sacrifice of the Mass is thus the sole means that the Church possesses of applying to the dead the merits of the Passion and Blood of Jesus Christ in all their efficacy. This is the teaching of the Church and the Council of Trent: speaking of the effects of the sacrifice, they do not distinguish between the living and the dead - which is tantamount to saying that the same power which the sacrifice possesses of drawing God's mercy upon those living on earth serves also to soften the rigours of justice with regard to the dead.[317]

The altar can still be seen in Rome where Gregory the Great said Mass, and where Jesus Christ appeared to inform him that every time he celebrated he obtained the deliverance of one soul from Purgatory.

St. Augustine, in book 12, chapter 22 of The City of God, speaking of those who have departed this life, divides them into two categories, the "middling good" and the "middling bad". The "middling good" are those whose lives have been sullied only by venial faults and slight imperfections. Sacrifice easily redeems these from their punishment and leads to their swift deliverance. The "middling bad" are those who have lived constantly in sin, whose lives were sullied by iniquity, but who nevertheless before death obtained pardon for their mortal sins. Sacrifice seldom shortens their punishment to any significant extent or secures their prompt deliverance: nonetheless, it is of great benefit to them, because it mitigates the intensity of their flames and diminishes the severity of their torments.

It is not uncommon for departed souls to appear to the living: time and again, God has permitted these manfestations, either to awaken the living from their omissions and torpor, or in order that abandoned souls might obtain a swifter relief.

The most trustworthy of these visions are those of St. Malachy, Archbishop of Armagh in Ireland, which we have already mentioned; that of Louis the Debonair, emperor and king, the son of Charlemagne, who, after thirty-three years of torments, appeared to his son, Louis I; that of Pope Benedict VII, who occupied the Chair of St. Peter for twelve years and, quite a long time after his death, appeared to the bishop of Lapree, who had been his friend; and that of a sister of St. Thomas Aquinas, whom the Doctor had directed, and who appeared to him to tell him of her departure from this world and her entry into the place of atonement. All these souls, who returned for a moment to earth by an exceptional permission of God, had no intention of satisfying the curiosity of the persons to whom they appeared by disclosing to them the secrets of the next life; but urged them to fast, weep and

[317] Accipe potestatem offerre sacrificium Deo, missasque celebrare tam pro vivis quam pro defunctis. (Pontificale Romanum)

pray, and asked for Masses to be offered for their intentions, in order to obtain relief for them and hasten their deliverance.

The sacrifice of the Mass is profitable, not only for the soul, but also for the body, "ut sit ad salutem animae et corporis."

The sacrifice of the Mass, says Tertullian, contributes pre-eminently to the peace of the Church. It obtains for peoples good and wise governments. It is beneficial to offer it for soldiers, for those who sail upon the sea, for the sick, and, in general, for all those who are beset by sorrow and anguish or are bereft of the goods and advantages of this life.[318] The sacrifice of the Mass, says St. John Chrysostom, should be offered for harvests, and for the preservation of the fruits of the earth.[319]

St. Augustine, in chapter 22 of The City of God, relates that in his time there was a house haunted by devils, and that as soon as Mass had been said in it the evil spirits disappeared. St. Gregory the Great, in his Dialogues, quotes the story of a man captured by pirates. He was taken to a distant land, and thrown into a dark cell. For a long time afterwards his wife and friends did not know what had happened to him and, despite their enquiries, were unable to find any trace of him. Released at length from captivity, he related that, on certain days, when he groaned in prison, his fetters broke loose from his feet and hands and fell off by themselves.

His wife and friends compared occasions and times, and ascertained that this marvel had occurred each time they had the holy sacrifice celebrated for the salvation of his soul. [320]

St. Antoninus, Archbishop of Florence, relates that two youths used to lead dissolute lives and give themselves up to licentiousness of every kind. One feast-day they went into the country, ostensibly on a hunting trip.

One of these young men, out of a lingering regard for religion, had heard Mass in the morning, before his departure. In the evening, having indulged in debauchery and shameful, drunken revelry, the two young men prepared to return home. Scarcely had they began their journey, when, all of a sudden, the sky became dark, flashes of lightning streaked the clouds, and a storm broke out with mingled thunderclaps and horrible wailing. Amidst this confusion of unleashed elements, a voice, the voice of God's justice, resounded unceasingly in the air, crying: "Strike! Strike!" The young man who had not attended Mass

[318] Sacrificium, pro communi Ecclesiarum pace, pro recta mundi compositione, pro imperatoribus, pro militibus et sociis, pro iis qui infirmitatibus laborant, pro his qui afflictionibus premuntur, et universim pro omnibus qui opibus indigent. (Tertullian: Ad Scapullam, ch.2)

[319] S. Chrysostomus saepe docet offerri sacrificium pro fructibus terrae proque aliis necessitatibus. (Rosset: p.574)

[320] St. Gregory the Great: lib.3, Dialogues, 37, - Bede: Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation, book 4, chapters 21 and 22.

was struck by a thunderbolt, which killed him instantaneously. The same voice continued to be heard, saying incessantly: "Strike! Strike!" The other young man, bewildered and terror-stricken, began to run, seeking to flee death and the vengeance of God which he felt approaching. But another voice was heard in the sky. It was that of Mercy, calling out: "Oh, no! Do not strike; for this morning he heard the words of salvation and life which are spoken at the altar: 'And the Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us...full of grace and truth.'"[321]

Alas, people no longer have even an inkling of the immense remedies and beneficence which they possess in Jesus Christ. They have no faith except in their physical strength and activity. They look upon themselves as tools and machines, and have no regard for one another except in terms of the level and rate of their salary.

Proudly and disdainfully, they say: Those who eat every day should work every day. Sunday, with its blessings, its Mass and its futile ceremonies, is simply the great tide of industry held up in its course for twenty-four hours; the workman's wages reduced by a seventh; destitution in the workshop; bread and clothing taken away from the child and from the wife of the tradesman and the indigent. St. Paul gives them his answer: Men of little faith, is the kingdom of God food and drink? Has He Who clothes the lily of the fields, and gives the birds of the air their nourishment, ever disappointed those who serve Him at the feast of His providence?

St. John Chrysostom tells us that Our Lord Jesus Christ shows Himself at the altar as on the throne of His clemency, His hands full of bounty and grace. He is surrounded by a multitude of angels, standing in an attitude of deep respect; and, through the medium of these celestial spirits, He bestows upon men all that promotes the good of soul and body. Who would dare, then, to affirm that this divine blood, shed every day upon our altars, had less power and efficacy than the sweat of man, rainfall, and dew from the sky to fructify our meadows and increase our industry? Where do we find prosperous families and strong, developed races, except amongst those who go up to the altar and help to ensure the abundance of those fruits, by the fervour of their invocations and the power of their collaboration?

In his treatise on Communion and Sacrifice, Fr. Rodriguez relates that a farmer used to set aside half an hour of his time every day to attend Mass. This farmer lived very comfortably, his lands sheltered from the inclemency of the weather; his fields seemed to be the best cultivated and the most fertile. No hostile influence or poisoned germs harmed his trees and vines. Every year his barns were filled with copious fruits. His friends and neighbours were struck with admiration, unable to find an explanation for the marvellous fact of such strange perfection. One day the farmer took one of them to the church, at the time when the holy sacrifice was being celebrated. This is my talisman and my treasure, he said, here is the great source of spiritual and temporal blessings. Everyone is free to go in. On that altar, where Jesus Christ comes down every day, He is pleased to fulfil, for the sake of those who visit and venerate Him,

[321] P. Rodriguez: Perfection Chretienne du Sacrifice de la Messe, ch.16.

the maxim which He spoke of old: "Seek ye therefore first the kingdom of God and his justice; and all these things shall be added unto you."[322]

The sacrifice of the Mass - if we applied its fruits to ourselves - would most certainly protect us from great calamities and serve our temporal interests more than our discoveries, industrial advances and all the learning of our agricultural experts ever will. It would promptly destroy, by its own power, the vine-mildew, phylloxera, all those mysterious diseases which poison our vines, fruits and even the tuber which the poor man uses to relieve his hunger. It would make us enjoy, even in this world, that compensatory abundance promised by the Gospel; a foretaste of Heaven, abounding in the crown of bounteousness to come.

Solomon, speaking of the figurative and imperfect sacrifices of the Old Law, said: "If the heavens be shut up and there fall no rain by reason of the sins of the people, and...if a famine arise in the land...or if their enemies waste the country...and they shall pray to thee in this place...then hear thou from heaven, O Lord,...and give rain to thy land which thou hast given to thy people to possess."

Ah, what would become of the world, saddened by so many misfortunes and scandals, if, at a time when hostile politicians conspire against Jesus Christ, or when a foul, licentious press by its blasphemies unceasingly calls down the wrath and malediction of God upon mankind - if at such a time as this the voice of Jesus Christ, as He descended each day upon the altar, did not ascend towards His Father, to present to Him petitions appealing for mercy rather than justice! And when I think that this sacrifice is performed every minute of the day, and that the sun in its orbit around the world does not cease for a moment, at some point or other of the earth, to cast its rays upon the spotless Host, I feel my heart swell and my hopes grow, and I can no longer comprehend our fears, our uncertainties and our rebelliousness.

Daniel, announcing the precursory signs of God's justice and the fall of kingdoms, and pointing out the great catastrophes which will wipe out from the face of the earth Jerusalem, and the great cities, drunk, like that deicide town, with the wine of adultery and fornication, tells us: "You will recognize that the great calamities are near, when you see the abomination of desolation in the holy place, and when the perpetual sacrifice shall have ceased." At the period of the final desolation, there will be a time when the unbloody sacrifice will no longer be celebrated over the whole surface of the earth. There will then be no mediator between the justice of God and man. The crimes and blasphemies will no longer have any counterbalance. That will be the moment when the just Judge will appear in His glory, and

[322] Quaerite ergo primum regnum Dei et justitiam ejus, et haec omnia adjicientur vobis. (Matthew 6:32)

the heavens will be folded up like a tent which has no more travellers to shelter.[323]

We have not yet reached that supreme period. To be convinced of this we need only consider the treasures of virtuous living, the marvels of dedication and heroism, which unceasingly reveal the picture of a watchful God who immolates Himself night and day.

Ah, how many priests, filled with divine fervour as they leave the altar, have torn themselves away from the arms of a tearful family and hastened into distant lands, to replace one of their brethren who had been devoured by animals or by horrific cannibals! How many virgins, voluntary captives, like St. Teresa, behind the dark gates of a cloister, have momentarily felt their hearts troubled by bitter desolations; have caught themselves, unawares, casting a regretful look upon the world and its pleasures, which they had left behind. Fortunately, the sanctuary was a few steps away from the cell in which they were subjected to those violent combats, and the thought of the divine Hermit, for nineteen centuries a prisoner of love, at once rekindled the fire of their devotion. They exclaimed: "Rather death than abandon Him." How many men, in a position to defend themselves, have kept silent in the face of an insult, and, instead of drawing the sword, have humbly turned the other cheek! Had these men, these "knights of ignominy", not one drop of noble blood in their veins? Were they cowards? Ah, the memory of their God, abandoned and annihilated on the altar, swallowing without complaint every ingratitude and outrage, made them trample underfoot the opinion and false judgements of men, and they exclaimed: Quis ut Deus?

This saying, "Quis ut Deus?", was the war-cry uttered in Heaven at the very beginning of time. Lucifer, the most dazzling and radiant archangel, and to-day the basest and most horrible of devils, raised the standard of the first revolt. Among the spirits whose leader he was, he sought to hold a plebiscite against God, aspiring to raise himself above the clouds of Heaven, and become like to the Most High.[324] There was then a great battle, in which truth and justice triumphed.[325] The archangel Michael

[323] Note by the publishers of the English edition. Fr. Arminjon appears to be asserting here that the abolition of the holy sacrifice of the Mass, as Daniel foretold would eventually happen, would be immediately followed by the Second Coming and the end of the world. There is no direct evidence of this in Holy Scripture and indeed it is in effect contradicted by Fr. Arminjon himself in the Second Conference (on pages 36 and 37) in which he firmly expresses the opinion that there will be many centuries between the reign and death of Antichrist (who will of course be responsible for the abolition of the last trace of the Mass) and the Second Coming and the end of the world.

[324] In coelum conscendam, super astra Dei exaltabo solium meum... Ascendam super altitudinem nubium, similis ero altissimo. (Isaias 14:13,14)

[325] Et factum est praelium magnum in caelo; Michael et angeli ejus praelibantur cum dracone, et draco pugnabat, et angeli ejus. (Apocalypse 12:7)

drew attention to the excellence and dignity of the Most High God. He reminded the good angels of the beneficence of Him who had created them, the gifts and prerogatives with which He had endowed their nature, and, saying to them "Quis ut Deus? - Who is like to God?" - maintained them in fidelity and submission.

We cannot, like the archangel Michael, make the Eternal One visible on His throne; but we have the Lamb, dead and immolated from the very beginning, in our midst.[326] We have the spectacle of that incomprehensible, infinite love which, in order to draw us to Him with greater gentleness and intensity, reduces itself each day to the tiny dimensions of a host, one inch in diameter. Modern society to-day, in the face of Heaven and earth, has proclaimed the most audacious boast ever conceived by human pride; it declares that it will exclude God from laws and institutions, creating a social order and felicity completely independent of Him; and, confronted with this Satanic design, it is our duty to protest loudly, saying, with the archangel: "Quis ut Deus?"

The time has come to conclude and sum up. The Church teaches that Jesus Christ truly dwells upon our altars, that the substance of the bread and wine is changed into the substance of His adorable flesh and blood, and that in this state He immolates Himself to His Father, for the sins of the world. However, in order that the sublime mystery of our altars may produce an effect [upon our lives], the faithful must be rightly disposed. It cannot purify a soul that is attached to its disorderly ways, nor restore to goodness a heart obdurate in evil. The Real Presence and sacrifice detach man from the life of the senses, and make him live a spiritual life; at the same time they show us the Supreme Benefactor, ever living in this vale of misery to soften our bitterness, appease our sufferings, dry up our tears, expunge our injustices and heal our wounds. Ah, if we bring forth our raptures in harmonious unison, if we surround our worship with all the magnificence of the arts, if we seek from nature the most precious things that she has to embellish our altars, and if our basilicas have shown the world new marvels and splendours, who can be surprised? The King of Heaven and earth, our Saviour and our God, dwells among us in person.[327]

You, then, feeble and faint-hearted souls, who feel your faith faltering and weakening, shaken by the effrontery and arrogant clamour of the wicked, turn your eyes for a moment upon the Christian world where, in spite of ingenious, mendacious conspiracies, Jesus Christ continues to be loved and adored.[328] See those crowds who fill our churches at the times of the major solemnities, kneeling humbly and invoking Jesus Christ with the unshakable

[326] Qui occisus est ab origine mundi. (Apocalypse 12:8)

[327] Moeller: Symbolique, translated by Mgr. Lachat.

[328] Note by the publishers of the English edition. Fr. Arminjon of course could not have written this sentence, or the rest of this paragraph, had he been writing today when there is no longer a "Christian world". It is one of the very few passages in the book which has been completely overtaken by events.

conviction that their prayer will reach Heaven. See the dying, as they press His blessed picture to their lips so as to fortify themselves against the anguish and the fears of their final agony. See those sorrowful countenances, bowing down at the steps of His lonely altars and straightening up again, beaming with an indescribable joy. See those sinners, stricken with remorse, beating their breasts and departing, trusting that they have regained pardon. Such is the infallible voice of mankind; the striking testimony of popular faith; the profound cry of public conscience, which can be diminished for a day but which all the threats of the mighty and the artifices of atheistic science will never succeed in stifling.

Napoleon, on the rock of his exile, said to one of his comrades in arms: "I understand men, and I tell you that Jesus Christ was not a man." He openly confessed the presence of Jesus Christ in His sacramental life, himself asking to receive the last Viaticum of the dying; and when, by this noble act, he had solemnly professed the faith of his childhood, he added to the same comrade in arms: "I am happy, general, to have fulfilled my duty, and I wish you the same fortune when you die."*

Let us be victims with Jesus Christ. Since He sacrifices Himself on the altar, let us give Him in return the fullness of our being. By giving Him our minds, we shall enlighten them with His understanding; by giving Him our hearts, we shall cure them of their weakness and inconstancy; by giving Him our whole being, we shall ensure our glory and indefectibility.[329]

* Note by the publishers of the English edition. A different version of Napoleon's last moments, effectively contradicting Fr. Arminjon's account, is given in Pius VII by Mary Allies, London, Burns and Oates, 1897.

[329] In a picturesque town in Switzerland, surrounded by green, wooded mountains, irrigated by an abundance of clear water, the author of this conference was walking one day in the company of a Protestant minister. The latter acknowledged that he accepted the Real Presence, and could not imagine how Calvin could have denied it; but he refused to accept the truth of the sacrifice of the Mass, on the grounds that, as the sacrifice of the Cross was, of its nature, superabundant and infinite, all other sacrifices became, by this very fact, useless and superfluous. The person to whom he addressed this opinion asked his interlocutor to consider the waterfalls that flowed down from the rocks, and the limpid streams that gushed from the hills or wound in and out through the meadow. "You see those springs," he remarked to the minister; "they, too, are perfect and plentiful. Will you, then, assert that it was useless to build aqueducts, and arrange catchment-basins, in order to bring the water inside the town?" The minister, who was a man of great learning and good faith, perceived the allusion and said immediately: "I understand." The Mass is, in fact, an application, not an addition to the sacrifice of the Cross, it is the means and the channel whereby the infinite power of the sacrifice of Calvary, accomplished once only, flows down upon the Church and the faithful.

NINTH CONFERENCE

The mystery of suffering in its relationship with the future life.

> Homo natus de muliere, brevi vivens tempore, repletur multis miseriis
>
> Man, born of a woman, living for a short time, is filled with many miseries. (Job 14:1)

There is one inevitable, mysterious and universal law, inexplicable to science.

It is the law of suffering.

This law, promulgated on the day when sin entered the world, is set out in three sentences which, in their sad universality, embrace the evils and all the misfortunes that afflict the human race: "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread", it was said to the man. "In sorrow shalt thou bring forth children," it was said to the woman. Dust, sickness and germs shall make thee subject to the decomposition which will be consummated in the tomb.

From the day when this threefold sentence was thundered forth, pain became a great law of mankind. Like an immense river, it has carried its bitter waters through the course of the ages for two thousand years. All mortal beings - to a greater or lesser degree, indeed, but all, without exception - have drunk deep therein.

All that has life, the Apostle says, is condemned to weep and groan: "Every creature groaneth and travaileth in pain, even till now."(Romans 8:22) The disinherited race of Adam, like a man gravely ill, turns over and over on its bed of grief and anguish. Notwithstanding its desperate efforts, and despite its industry and the extent of its conquests, it has not ceased for a moment to suffer; up till now it has been unable to overcome poverty, illness and death. Before Christ, mankind bore the appearance of a tortured criminal, smitten, says Isaias, from head to foot, and without a single part of his body left sound. To free it from the inexorable law which had weighed it down since its fall, nothing less was necessary than a doctor from Heaven. The sick man could be cured only by the application of a higher, divine remedy.

Without doubt, Jesus Christ could have abolished pain at a single stroke, and, by virtue of the infinite grace of the Redemption, restored man to the state of complete, unmixed bliss which he enjoyed in the paradise of innocence. He did not so wish. He judged that, for some, suffering would be a source of merit, a gain, a source of glory and a means of renewal and triumph; that, for the greater number, it would be a necessary expiation. He therefore maintained suffering, but purified, ennobled and transfigured it by taking it upon Himself. He became the man of sorrows, virum dolorum, in the strict and absolute sense of these words.

Jesus Christ could have appeared amongst us, radiant with joy and encompassed by divine splendour, amidst the glitter and pomp of His sovereign majesty. He deemed it more worthy of His glory and more profitable to the salvation of men, to show Himself to them girt with a diadem of thorns, clothed in purple and stained with blood, His face bruised, the grimace of death on His lips, bearing the bloody unction of the nails imprinted on His hands and feet.

In uniting us closely with suffering, Christ assuredly did not smoothe all its severity and all its pangs; but He removed part of its bitterness, corrected and destroyed its poison. He made the chalice of His blood fruitful. Like the brazen serpent set up by Moses in the desert, He implanted Himself in the centre of the world as an inexhaustible instrument of mercy, life and health. Owing to this transformation, His divine wounds, like fountains ever gushing, remain eternally open to all straying and fallen souls who are eager to escape from their coarse, sensual aspirations, wanting to immerse themselves anew in the joys of sacrifice and the honour of purity.

Who would not admire here the depth of the counsels of infinite Wisdom! Man had become lost in the paradise of bliss: he will rise again amidst the sorrows of Calvary. He had refused to go to God by the way of happiness: Jesus Christ will open a better and surer way for him, that of the Cross. "Heaven and earth were separate; the Cross has brought them together." In the Cross is salvation; in the Cross is strength and joy of mind; in it is to be found the complement of virtue and the abundance of all holiness.[330]

The cross, before Jesus Christ let Himself be nailed to it, was a mark of infamy, an instrument of malediction and disgrace; but when, resigned and inflamed with love, He had lain down upon that tree of woe like the spouse upon his marriage bed, the cross was washed of the ignominy with which it had been sullied, it became the starting-point of glorious renovations, the emblem of royalty and greatness, the prize of genius and gallantry, the fruitful stimulus of heroic battles, the source of the most indescribable joys and of the surest and truest consolations. "O sweet Cross," exclaimed St. Andrew, "adorned with the limbs of the Lord, long desired Cross, tenderly loved, sought after unceasingly, take me in your arms back to my divine Master, so that He Who through you has redeemed me may through you vouchsafe to receive me."[331]

So it is that the rugged splendours of Calvary infinitely surpass all the delights and raptures of Thabor, and that, following their leader Stephen, countless generations of martyrs and saints have relished more sweetness in the hail of stones that were cast at them than they would have tasted in showers of fragrance and roses.

[330] In cruce salus, in cruce vita, in cruce protectio ab hostibus; in cruce infusio supernae suavitatis, in cruce robur mentis, in cruce gaudium spiritus. In cruce summa virtutis, in cruce perfectio sanctitatis. Non est salus animae, nec spes aeternae vitae, nisi in cruce. (Thomas a Kempis: Imitation of Christ, book 2, chapter 12)

[331] O bona crux, quae decorem ex membris Domini suscepisti, diu desiderata, sollicite amata, sine intermissione quaesita, et aliquando cupienti, animo praeparata, accipe me ab hominibus et redde me magistro meo; ut per te me recipiat qui per te me redemit. (Roman Breviary, lectio for the Feast of St. Andrew)

Such is the exalted, magnificent doctrine which we shall treat in this last conference, enlarging on it and harmonizing it.

We can imagine why the philosopher, guided only by natural reason, should complain in his trials that he takes his sufferings as an excuse for blaspheming Heaven and Providence, or that, wrapping himself in the mantle of stoic disdain, he should exclaim: "Suffering, I spurn you, for you are but a superfluous word." We Christians, however, guided by a higher light, raise our eyes towards the celestial future, of which the tribulations of this life are the preparation and pledge. Has not our Master told us that suffering is the ante-chamber through which we must pass in order to enter the kingdom of glory?[332] Let us accept it, as proof of the tender beneficence of this God who makes us share in His sorrows and agony only to render us worthy of the eternal crown which He is preparing for us.

In order to cover the general lines of our subject, let us study suffering from the three aspects of nature, grace, and glory.

From the point of view of nature, suffering is a principle of dignity and moral strength for man. From the point of view of grace, it is the principle of our incorporation into the divine life of Jesus Christ. From the point of view of glory, it is a principle and source of hope.

I

Before speaking of the advantages of pain and the marvellous benefits which it brings to the soul, it is appropriate to recall its meaning in philosophy.

St. Thomas[333] defines pain as evil that repels - that is, the obstacle which obstructs - the exercise of the powers of the soul, or the free development of corporeal and sensitive life. Pain is an impression which affects the soul and causes it repugnance, either when the mind cannot attain the truth which is its object, or when the will is frustrated in the good which it pursues. Whether pain has its seat in the mind or in the body, it is an impression abhorrent to the creature who feels it; to an extent, it deforms him and causes a deterioration and a kind of diminution in him. In the mind, an evil or obstacle is called sadness, regret or anguish; in the body, it is called debility, pain or sickness. Whatever be the nature or the countless forms which pain may assume, it is, in essence, a vexation, a conflict, a lack of balance and harmony, in the intellectual faculties or in the sensory organs of the body. In short, pain is an impediment which runs counter to the normal course of life, just as joy is a mode of consonance which promotes its full expansion.

[332] Nonne haec oportuit pati Christum, et ita intrare in glorium suam? (Luke 24:26)

[333] Causa enim doloris est malum conjunctum quod repugnat corpori; causa autem interioris doloris est malum conjunctum quod repugnat appetitui. Dolor etiam exterior sequitur apprehensionem interiorem vel imaginationis scilicet, vel etiam rationis. Nam dolor interior est ex eo quod aliquid repugnat ipsi appetitui; exterior autem dolor, ex hoc quod aliquid repugnat corpori. (St. Thomas: Summa Theologica, II, Q.25, A.6)

The pagan philosophers, aided solely by the light of reason, had a certain understanding of the advantages and rewards of suffering.

They regarded it as the best of schools, where man could train himself in the laborious and difficult study of himself, and prepare himself to fulfil, one day, the great tasks of human life.

"Woe to the child of fortune," they would say, "reared amidst the lure of luxury and softness, the man upon whom the world has constantly smiled, and who has never been thwarted or hindered in his desires." If, amongst men intoxicated and corrupted by prosperity, there is a lingering trace of tenderness, if there is human compassion in them, and if the heart of a man still beats in their breast, it will be merely for the sake of their selfishness and the satisfaction of their disordered passions. "Woe to the peoples, when such men succeed in taking hold of the sceptre of public power. Like Tiberius and Nero, they will be the scourges of the human race. The whole earth will come before their eyes like a prey reserved for the satisfaction of their colossal pride and their most extravagant and brutish appetites."

Those sages further added:

"What mortal has ever looked at suffering, with its severe and sombre countenance, or squared up to it, without soon blessing it as a sweet gift from Heaven. Just as the hardest mortals soften and melt under the effect of fire, so it is that suffering transforms noble souls. It arouses in them a virtue which moves, restores, supernaturalizes and soothes them.

"Take, for instance, the poor man who has long suffered indigence and unhappiness. If he attains wealth, he will use it with wisdom and moderation. He has learned through hard experience how much it costs to be poor, to eat a seldom-found loaf of bread, and to live on earth wandering, sick and ignored. Look at the statesman, the mighty and respected prince. If, before being raised to the throne, he has endured the anguish and bitterness of exile, if he has drunk to the full the cup of ingratitude and opprobrious conduct, he will not let himself be dazzled as much as another man by the grandeur and glitter of his sovereignty. He will willingly cast a respectful and compassionate eye upon an obscure subject fallen into disgrace. He knows that nobility of thought and loftiness of soul can lie hidden under rags no less than under the dignity of kingship; he recalls to mind that he, too, has long lived in banishment, a fugitive unknown and defamed. Or look at the priest: when, by the melancholy of his eyes, the premature deterioration of his features and the smile of resignation on his lips, people conclude that suffering has often visited his soul, he is held in greater respect and affection. Those who are forsaken will lean their grief-stricken souls more trustingly upon his, in the belief that remedy and consolation are bound to flow from his soul in a more paternal and merciful manner. Lastly, is this man, tried by long and bloody misfortunes, an obscure, forsaken creature? Far from despising him, we see in his pain a glorious purification of his life. A secret feeling tells us that such a man is a privileged being, carefully prepared by the divine hand for a destiny more glorious than that of time. In him we admire a nobility more splendid than that of blood, the nobility of suffering unflinchingly borne."

I do not know whether everyone thinks so, but the soul that has suffered long and greatly seems less attached to the earth. His changed and chastened disposition makes him seem more angelic than human. This man and that woman have lived amid the joys of life, without ever having felt or tasted them. Does not such a state imprint an immortal sublimity upon them? Does not an inner voice tell us that these souls possess a closer and deeper vision of the mysteries of Heaven; that their heart is a sanctuary which sends forth a more expansive fragrance of faith, hope and love?

In the East, there are certain aromatic woods which are crushed and mashed, so as to make the fragrant liquor, mingled with their sap, spring out. In the same way, divine goodness tramples and crushes man in the wine-press of affliction, in order to chastise in him a flesh that has served as an abode for early disorders, to set him free from all dregs of corruption, and so that he may become the mysterious vessel from which will flow the inexhaustible source of all virtue.

One thing is certain: there has never been, and never will be, moral elevation, heroic holiness, or virtue worthy of the name, which does not have its principle or draw its growth and strength in suffering freely accepted or dauntlessly undergone.

How is it that our will is often wavering and undecided, that our life is strewn with such strange fluctuations and such unhappy fickleness, that we are dejected by insignificant things, that an inconsiderate word said to us, or a change in the serenity of the sky, is enough to make us go from the height of joy to the depths of gloom? The cause of these fluctuations and changes is simply the repugnance and instinctive horror we feel towards suffering.

By the assiduous care we take to refuse the slightest hardship and the least injury, and to keep away from us anything that seems even in the smallest degree demanding, we create for ourselves a state of abject bondage. Our heart falls under the sway of as many tyrants as there are impressions, each of which in turn grips us in its influence. No virtue can subsist in such fickle souls, no high position is compatible with a character that drifts along with every current and turn of fortune. Thus the man in this state turns aside from his stern duties, and becomes a slave to the most futile fantasies. Forgetting that human life is a reality and not fiction, he seeks diversion in frivolous amusements, squanders his best years in pleasures and idleness and boredom, and consumes fruitlessly the talent which God had entrusted to him. In this enfeebling frame of mind, a man need only come before him with threatening words and the power to interfere with his repose, interests or pleasures, and that man will at once be his master, will have full power to subject him either to a degrading bondage or to unspeakable tortures.

How far removed from the inexhaustible pettiness of these flabby, effeminate souls is the firm, high-minded attitude of him who, by dint of doing battle with suffering, has become, as it were, inured to its wounds and blows! How fine it is to see him serene and majestic, amidst storms and the agitation of passions, fulfilling the words of the wise man: "Non constristabit justum quidquid ei acciderit - Whatsoever shall befall the just

man, it shall not make him sad."[334]

Calmly he hears the noise of revolutions, and sees republics and dynasties pass; it is as if the scene of men's vain and conflicting interests lay in the nether regions beneath his feet. No disturbance on this earth moves him, because he has learned to see events in the infinite wisdom which governs all things by its providence, and which permits evil only in order to draw good from it by a striking manifestation. He carries within himself a kind of haven of happiness and repose. Mankind and the elements combined are powerless to offend or harm him. Is he sent into exile? He will reply with a great bishop: For me, the whole earth is my native land and my exile. Is he stripped of his goods? He has learned how to possess them without permitting them to enthral his heart. Is he put to death? Death, for him, is transfiguration to a better life, emancipation from his sufferings.

Such was the serenity and heroic constancy of St. John Chrysostom, banished by Eudoxia, Empress of Constantinople.

"When I was fleeing the town," said the Saint, "I did not feel my misfortune at all, and I was interiorly inundated with the most indescribable consolations. If the Empress sends me into exile - I said to myself - I shall consider that the earth and all that it contains is the Lord's. If she has me thrown into the sea, I shall remember Jonas. If she orders me to be stoned, I shall be the companion of St. Stephen. If she has me beheaded, I shall have the glory of John the Baptist. If she strips me of what I possess, I shall reflect that I came forth naked from the bowels of the earth, and must return to it naked and stripped of everything."

Count de Maistre relates the story of a girl who was the wonder of the city of St. Petersburg. Suffering had transfigured her, and had made the light of supernatural, anticipated glory shine out in her bearing and features. She was consumed by a cancer which was eating away her head. Her nose and eyes had disappeared already. The disease was moving across her virginal brow like a fire which consumes a palace. The whole city was amazed at the sweetness of her voice and her angelic resignation, and hastened to wonder at the delightful spectacle. When someone expressed compassion for the sufferings of the girl, she replied: "I do not suffer as much as you think, for God grants me the grace of often thinking of Him." One day, to people who asked her what prayers she would offer to God when she was in Heaven, she replied: "I shall ask Him to grant you the grace to love Him as I love Him myself."[335]

The pagans had already perceived this reflection and halo of beauty and grandeur which suffering leaves on the creature's brow.

[334] Proverbs 12:21. Horace expressed the same thought in the well-known line, "Si fractus labatur orbis, impavidum ferient ruinae - If the whole world disintegrated, the fragments would strike him unperturbed."

[335] <u>Soirees de Saint-Petersbourg</u>: vol.1.

One day, the prince of their philosophers set himself this daunting problem: If the Divinity were ever to condescend to come down upon earth, under what image would it be fitting for Him to appear? Plato walked about for a long time, silent and pensive, turning over in his mind, one by one, all the leading figures of human history. The most dazzling countenances, those of potentates, did not seem to him pure enough. Finally, he formed a picture of a man, master of his affections, whose least thoughts were irreproachable; he was pleased to portray him as being foreign to all strife, responding by gentle goodness to the cruellest treatment, calm and serene amidst the wave of insults and fury of a riotous multitude, radiant even on the infamous gibbet, to which his uncomprehended virtue had led him.

Plato considered that, if mankind ever succeeded in producing such a figure, it would have achieved its highest endeavour, and that the earth would have no finer spectacle for which to envy Heaven; and, with the enthusiasm and solemnity of a wise man affirming one of those great truths which the human ear has never heard, Plato exclaimed: "If the Divinity were ever to condescend to become visible to men, there would be only one image worthy of It, that of the just man suffering."

II

Has Jesus Christ made complete and absolute satisfaction for our sins? Did He take upon Himself, not only the eternal punishment, but also the temporal punishment due to them? St. Thomas replies in the affirmative, and gives as evidence the constant practice of the Church, which does not impose any penance upon the faithful reborn by baptism, and the universal tradition that, once man has been enveloped in the image of Jesus Christ by the water of baptism, he dies entirely to his former vices, has no further punishment or atonement to undergo on this earth, and, if he died after being regenerated by the sacrament, would be admitted immediately to the vision of God, without passing through the flames of Purgatory.

But, for the unfortunate transgressors of baptismal innocence, guilty of serious faults after the supreme grace of the first sacrament, redemption is not transmitted in this privileged form and in this full and superabundant measure. After baptism, when divine mercy descends upon us it is always accompanied by a measure of justice. We are still assured of the infinite merits and fruit of Christ's sufferings, but on condition that we obtain them by personal co-operation and by energetic and violent efforts. In a word, penance, as Tertullian calls it, is a baptism of pain. In this sacrament, destined to regenerate the soul which is dead a second time owing to sin, the blood and tears of Jesus Christ are no longer shed in order to spare our own, but instead to render them fruitful and proportionate to the scanty virtue of our amends, and to the immensity of the debts incurred by our crimes.

It follows that there are only two paths leading to eternal life: innocence and penance.

Penance is a law of proportion. St. Paul tersely sets out the principle which determines its intensity and degree in these words: "...as you have yielded your members to serve uncleanness and iniquity, unto iniquity,

so now yield your members to serve justice, unto sanctification."[336] Reparation, to be sufficient, must equal the disorder contained in the fault. The state of the sinful man in his relations with creatures is not that of the man who has never rendered himself guilty of any offence. The person who has been unfortunate enough to let himself be misled by the voice of the tempter and, adhering to the gross attractions of creatures, has preferred their deceptive and limited beauty to the beauty of the Creator - such a person is bound, at the cost of the most indescribable, heart-rending efforts, to tear himself away from the occasions of sin which have led him astray, and from the people who have charmed and enticed him. Making his way back through the slimy waters of the torrent which dragged him along, he must rigorously punish the heart, imagination or senses which had rebelled against reason and the law of God, just as he would punish an intractable servant or some rebellious slaves.

The fundamental principle of penance consists in the fact that, for one who has fallen a second time, there is only one means of reintegration: the courageous and voluntary acceptance of a measure of pain equal to the measure of pleasure and sweetness relished amidst iniquity and crime. Hence it follows, in accordance with the profound observation of St. Ignatius Loyola, that penance by no means consists in the renunciation of all excess, or in the reduction of that which is useless and superflous. To eliminate unnecessary things is the virtue of temperance, [337] not the virtue of penance. Penance takes place only when man cuts out what is agreeable, and deprives himself of part of what is useful or necessary.[338]

[336] Humanum dico propter infirmitatem carnis vestrae; sicut enim exhibuistis membra vestra servire immunditiae et iniquitati ad iniquitatem; ita nunc exhibete membra vestra servire justitiae in sanctificationem. (Romans 6:19)

[337] St. Ignatius Loyola: Spiritual Exercises, Additions.

[338] If you do not penance, Our Lord has said, you will all perish. It is of the nature of penance to be proportionate to the fault. If amends are not made spontaneously in this world, they will be made without fail in the next. The Church does indeed offer us the merits of the saints and indulgences as repayment for the debts we have contracted; but indulgences imply penance. They are a substitution and a means of reversibility. Just as in the social body, by virtue of the solidarity which unites the various members, one subject may discharge another of part or the whole of his penalty by himself undergoing the punishment deserved, so the Church, which has assiduously gathered in her treasuries the Blood of Jesus Christ and the satisfaction offered by the saints, applies them to us, by means of conditions easy to fulfil, in order to come to our aid in our weakness during this life and to spare us cruel torments after death; but this doctrine, which is none other than that one man is able morally to represent another man, exemplifies even more forcefully the truth that there is no remission of sins but by blood: Et sine sanguinis effusione non fit remissio. (Hebrews 9:22)

Nonetheless, the mystery is still not resolved. There are on earth souls exempt from all trace of sin and imperfection. Leaving aside the Most Holy Virgin, conceived without sin, and St. John the Baptist, sanctified in the womb of his mother, a multitude of other saints have led quite celestial lives here on earth, closely united to God, without any coarse desire or any trace of the senses ever darkening the beauty and radiant splendour of their souls. Yet they have assumed a larger share of this immense legacy of pain bequeathed to our sorrowful humanity.

Hence suffering has a higher and more general cause than atonement. That cause is the consequence of one of the most profound and incomprehensible mysteries of our Faith, in which the whole economy of Christianity is summed up and on which we seldom ponder, the mystery of the incorporation of our life in the divine life of Jesus Christ.

It can be said that, in a certain sense, Jesus Christ in Heaven is not complete. On the throne where, since His glorious Ascension, He has reigned seated at the right hand of His Father, there is still not the totality, but a mere beginning of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is "yesterday, and today and the same for ever."[339] Jesus Christ and the universality of the faithful form but one body and one spirit, unum corpus et unus spiritus.[340] This mystical body of Christ, which is the same as the Church, is built up gradually: it expands and grows by incorporating the elect, whose minds are open to the light of the Faith and whose hearts to the unction of charity. Jesus Christ will not attain His perfect development, He will not reach the fullness of His years and the maturity of man, until the angel of the Lord shall have marked the seal of the living God upon the forehead of the last of the predestinate. Until that day the mystery of the Ascension will continue; it endures and increases each time that a soul co-operates efficaciously with this divine structure and, emerging from a pure life, superadds itself to form the celestial city, and "super-constructs" itself, as a living stone, in the eternal basilica of the saints.

Now, the mystical and collective body of Jesus Christ is modelled upon His individual body.

To bring about our redemption, Jesus Christ had no need to pass through a period of thirty-three years' duration. Scarcely after having been conceived He could have leapt forth from his mother's womb in dazzling splendour, and gone to astonish Heaven by His triumphant and unexpected entry. This He did not wish. To enter the sanctuary of His glory, the shortest and easiest way was not the one which most attracted His heart. He preferred to ascend to Heaven by the bloody stages of His ignominies and searing pains. He desired that the whole of eternity and the omnipotence of His radiance should spring from the very scars of His wounds; and, so that there should not be a single part in the whole of His body which did not shed its special ray of beauty, He desired to give it over completely to pain and, from head to foot, to feel its cruel, murderous assaults.

[339] Christus heri et hodie; ipse et in saecula. (Hebrews 13:8)

[340] Ephesians 4:4.

What was accomplished in Jesus Christ individually must be continued in His collective or mystical body. Such is the law of indestructible solidarity, established between the head and the members. It would scarcely be fitting if the latter were to soar up into glory without passing through the transformations endured by the head. It cannot be granted that Jesus Christ wanted to open up two differing paths leading to Heaven, one for Himself, rough and excruciating, the other for His followers, comfortable and strewn with roses and pleasures. The Apostle teaches us that the body of Jesus Christ is closely bound together in all its parts; all disparate elements are incompatible with its composition;[341] it is sublimely arranged, and unites in its structure that harmony and perfection which, one day, will produce an incomparable reflection of the sovereign glory and majesty. Now, says St. Bernard, would it not be an unnatural medley, a strange, incongruous contrast, if a head crowned with thorns were joined to an exquisite limb, or a flesh scourged with lashes to a flesh reared in luxury and softness? Pudeat sub capite spinato membrum esse delicatum.

Ah, the sufferings and afflictions which break our hearts and draw harrowing cries from us, even to the point of making us shed tears of blood, are far from leaving Jesus Christ indifferent. No one has had more experience of them than He, or felt them more keenly; for He suffered their effects, and, in the Garden of Olives, as Isaias says, personally bore our infirmities and carried our sorrows.[342] However, would not a natural sense of pity which led Him to abolish suffering and dry up the source of our groans at every turn be, on His part, an illogicality, an act of blind, insensate tenderness? Could Jesus Christ derogate from the plan of His wisdom, abolishing the duties inherent in the nobility of our origin and in the glorious prerogatives bestowed upon us by baptism? As subjects and members of a divine head, our first duty is to follow our Master in all His ways and undergo all the vicissitudes which He Himself endured. In order to deserve to be glorified with Him one day, it is imperative that, on this earth, we should suffer with Him: Si tamen compatimur ut et conglorificemur.[343] Just as, at the end of our lives, we shall begin to share in the Ascension of Jesus Christ, so conversely, in accordance with the mind of the Apostle, we must complete in ourselves, as long as our pilgrimage lasts, that which is lacking in the sufferings and anguish of His Passion: adimpleo ea quae desunt passionum Christi.[344]

The Passion of Jesus Christ did not, indeed, end on Calvary.

[341] Ex quo totum corpus compactum, et connexum per omnem juncturam subministrationis, secundum operationem in mensuram uniuscujusque membri, augmentum corporis facit in aedificationem sui in charitate. (Ephesians 4:15)

[342] Vere languores nostros ipse tulit et dolores nostros ipse portavit. (Isaias 53:4)

[343] Romans 8:17.

[344] Colossians 1:24.

On Calvary Christ endured pain in all its intensity. His pain was immense, as bitter as the waters of the ocean; it exceeded all measure, all comparision and all expression. But He did not endure pain in all its forms. He was pierced by nails, but He was not burned over a slow fire. He saw His disciples flee, frightened of the scandal of the Cross; He did not experience that other kind of pain, less sharp, no doubt, but more extensive and filled with groans and tears, of a mother who sees death wrench a beloved child from her arms. He felt real pain, caused by the sins and malice of men, but He did not feel the imaginary and fanciful sorrows of a rebellious soul, which feeds on myths, and looks forward with delirious fervour to a future it is unable to attain, and cannot find contentment in duty and the austere practice of virtue. Jesus Christ felt the shame and repentance due for our sins; He was not smitten with the remorse and shame which overwhelm the sinner as he recalls his own iniquities. All these different kinds of pain, which Jesus Christ did not suffer in His own person, He must complete in His members. The sorrowful Passion of the Saviour must be consummated in all ages and places. For, just as later, in Heaven, Jesus Christ will be all and in all through His bliss and glory, so, in this world below until the end of time, He must be all and in all through his afflictions and agonies, omnia et in omnibus Christus.[345]

These considerations explain the ardent thirst for suffering which consumed the saints, and the indescribable delights which made them thrill with joy at the stake and on the rack, when their flesh was being burned and their bones dislocated. The love of the Cross with which they felt inflamed made them break forth in incomprehensible strains of joy.

St. Theresa, numb with cold, tormented by rheumatism and overwhelmed by fatigue and austerities, yet transfixed in the inmost depths of her soul with the sword of the Seraphim, would exclaim, amidst her languor and distraction: aut Pati, aut mori - either suffer or die.

St. Ignatius of Antioch, sentenced to be thrown to the wild beasts, was on his way to Rome to take part in the festive games ordered by the emperor Trajan. On the journey he was surrounded by soldiers, savage beasts with human faces, who roared about him like tigers and leopards. Amidst their vociferous clamour, and escorted by friends and disciples who pressed forward to receive his final greetings and injunctions from his own lips, he majestically raised his head, already shining with a celestial, superhuman glory, and, seized with a holy transport, full of hope in God, uttered words hitherto unknown to the human tongue:

"May the fury of the beasts be my joy... Be not moved by a false compassion for me. If you act against me in this way, I shall be the first to excite the animals and urge them to devour me. Forgive me, my sons, I know what is good for me. I am now beginning to be a worthy disciple of Jesus Christ, and no longer seek visible things, so that I may the more swiftly and surely find Jesus Christ... Yes, come fire, cross and beast, come the severing of my limbs and the breaking of my body."

And, on hearing the roar of the lions, he cried out:

[345] Colossians 3:11.

"I am the grain of Jesus Christ, I want to be ground by the teeth of the animals so that I may be served as pure bread at Christ's table."[346]

To understand the sentiments which inspired the holy bishop and to grasp the meaning of the strange words which came forth from his lips, we must recall that Jesus Christ, in the Gospel, compares the Church and Heaven to a granary, and the elect to a grain of wheat.

This similitude is the source of a whole doctrine and a lofty moral.

The grain of wheat does not attain its complete perfection until it undergoes a threefold death, the effect of which is to raise it to a threefold dignity and life.

Thus, as autumn draws to its close, the farmer ploughs the grain of wheat into the furrow; the grain dissolves and decomposes under the effect of the humidity, mingles with other sap and disappears, so much so that, to the casual observer, it seems irretrievably lost; but, at the first rays of the spring sunshine, the grain that seemed forever extinct draws fecundity from its apparent death, and is reborn in the form of a rejuvenated, renewed ear of corn. Yet this is not the final point in the perfection of this grain of wheat. It is called to a still more marvellous transfiguration, to attain which it must undergo a second death, by being placed beneath the millstone, crushed, and ground into powder. From this, bread will be made, and it will become the food and flesh of man, sharing in the dignity of his intellectual life. Lastly, for this grain of wheat, there remains one dignity and perfection above all others. It will be placed upon the altar; the priest will pronounce over it the sacramental words of consecration; this time it will be utterly annihilated, right to the root of its substance; no trace or shadow of its original essence will remain; but, in exchange, this inert bread will cease to be base matter, and become the God whom the angels adore.[347]

[346] Utinam fruar bestiis quae mihi sunt paratae, quas et oro mihi veloces esse ad interitum et ad supplicia, et allici ad comedendum me, ne sicut aliorum martyrum non audeant corpus attingere. - Quod si venire noluerint, ego vim faciam, ego me urgebo, ut devorer. Ignoscite mihi, filioli: quid mihi prosit, ego scio. - Nunc incipio Christi esse discipulus, nihil de his quae videntur desiderans, ut Jesum Christum inveniam, ignis, crux, bestiae, confractio ossium, membrorum divisio, et totius corporis contritio, et tormenta diaboli in me veniant: tantum ut Christo frûar. - Cumque jam damnatus esset ad bestias, et ardore patienti rugientes audiret leones, ait; Frumentus Christi sum, dentibus bestiarum molar, ut panis mundus inveniar. (St. Jerome: <u>Life of St. Ignatius</u>, book 1)

[347] Amen, amen dico vobis, nisi granum frumenti cadens in terram, mortuum fuerit, ipsum solum manet: si autem mortuum fuerit, multum fructum affert. (John 12:24)

Thus it is only by undergoing a threefold death that man shakes off the coarse trammels of material nature which darken his vision and corrupt him, and emerges from the transient and finite into the eternal and infinite.

In order to raise himself to the height of perfection and restore the faded image of God in him, it is necessary for him to die to his senses, his spirit and his own judgements, and, finally, to immolate himself in his heart and die to his own affections.

Jesus Christ is the father of the family, and the great celestial harvester. From Heaven, where He is seated, He sees the good seed on earth dissolve and perish in the fire of affliction. Far from feeling sorrow, His divine heart quivers and breaks out in transports of joy and benediction, exclaiming: "This is My wheat; it is being purified and transformed; it will be worthy to enter into My fullness; and then the most ardent desire of My heart will be fulfilled."

Such is the magnificent result of suffering, which makes us die - for a moment - to ourselves, only to make us live a divine life in Jesus Christ which buries us in a dark and mournful shroud, only to cast into the depth of our being the seed of immortality and introduce us gently, by way of anticipation, into the state of glory and resurrection.

"O Father, all those whom Thou hast given to Me are become ONE with Me; They have been joined to My life by a union as intimate, an affinity as wonderful, as those which, from all the ears of corn ground under the same stone, form one bread, one single substance, unus panis, unum corpus."[348]

III

In order to mitigate our ills and lessen our trials in this vale of sorrow and misery, the merciful Saviour desired to give us a sure pledge of His tenderness, and to offer us a guarantee of the heavenly bliss which He is preparing for us. This guarantee, this real testimony of the Beatific Vision, which made the souls of the saints sigh with joy, is not the brilliant successes of this world, or temporal glory or happiness, but trials and suffering.

The saints did not aspire to any other goods, and wanted no other wages for their labours. If they met one of their friends they would say: "Come, brother; our dwelling-place is in the hollow of rocks, where we sleep on wet ground and where there is no bed, we feed on wild herbs, and for our refeshment we have but the water of the springs; around our dwellings we hear the roars of wild beasts, which are however, less fearsome than inhuman

[348] Ego pro eis rogo: non pro mundo rogo, sed pro his quos dedisti mihi...ut omnes unum sint, sicut tu pater in me et ego in te, ut et ipsi in nobis unum sint. (John 17:9,21) Unus panis, unum corpus, multi sumus, omnes qui de uno pane participamus. (1 Corinthians 10:17)

tyrants and barbarians, whose hatred and implacable ferocity pursue us unremittingly; but come without fear, there are indescribable joys and consolations, for there is indescribable suffering."

At first sight, language of this kind conflicts with reason, and upsets all our human judgements.

Yet the saints, living on these lofty heights of faith, saw the events of the present world and the destinies of mankind from a different point of view, and a different perspective. They judged the things of time by their relationship with those of eternity and they understood the profound meaning of one of the most sublime sayings of Scripture:[349] Trial worketh hope.

Without trial there is no hope.

Let us take the case of a man whose every desire on this earth is satisfied; he will be lulled to sleep amidst this fatal prosperity; he will seek no other life; thoughts of Heaven will be powerless to detach him from the slime of material and tangible things; but, should an affront to honour or a cruel affliction press its sharp, painful barbs into that man, then like a liquor compressed into a narrow vessel, his heart, annihilated and crushed beneath the weight of the misfortune, will at once seek a way out for itself; and not finding a single object to which it can turn for support or which assures it of relief, it breaks free from the ephemeral bonds of space and time, and casts its longing gaze upon the mountains of infinite Mercy whence flows all refeshment, light and succour.

The Patriarch Job, in his moving history, reveals to us the profound economy of suffering, and describes the abundant founts of joy wherein souls can drink deep amidst the most heart-rending sorrows.

Job had flocks and countless sheep; and these flocks were decimated by epidemics and plagues. Job had magnificent, sumptuous houses; and these houses were consumed by fire from Heaven. He had children who were his pride and joy, united to one another by the tenderest affection; and one day, while they were seated at a fraternal repast, they lost their lives, pitifully crushed beneath falling ruins. He had friends; and these, instead of comforting him, considered that he had been struck by the hand of Heaven for some mysterious and unknown crime. He had a wife; and his wife, filled with disgust and horror, shunned the infection of his sores. Finally, he had a God to Whom he offered sacrifice seven times a day; and God withdrew from him the dew of heavenly consolation and seemed to have utterly abandoned him.

[349] Scientes, quod tribulatio patientiam operatur; patientia autem probationem, probatio vero Spem. (Romans 5:3,4.)

Certainly, never before had such a violent profusion of pain fallen upon the head of a victim.

At one moment despair seemed to overcome the soul of Job, and his whole strength appeared as if shackled.

"My soul," he exclaimed, "is weary of my life... Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night in which it was said: A man-child is conceived. Let that day be turned into darkness: let not God regard it from above: and let not the light shine upon it... Let a darksome whirlwind seize upon that night: let it not be counted in the days of the year, nor numbered in the months... Why didst thou bring me forth out of the womb? O that I had been consumed that eye might not see me... Why received upon the knees? Why suckled at the breasts? Shall not the fewness of my days be ended shortly? Suffer me, therefore, that I may lament my sorrow a little before I go, and return no more to a land that is dark and covered with the mist of death."[350]

Suddenly, Job ceased to complain, a transformation came over his person, his face lit up, his countenance and gaze became clear and radiant; the hymn of hope sprang from his lips, like a torrent of joy and peace. How lovely it is to see this Job, who had previously said to the worms, "My mother and my sister," and to rottenness, "Thou art my father," when, seated on his dunghill, like a conquering hero he cries out, in the elation and enthusiasm of his faith:

"I know that my Redeemer liveth, and in the last day I shall rise out of the earth...and in my flesh I shall see my God."[351]

Never had human lips given voice to a canticle more eloquent and divine. Does not this prime example of the sorely-tried, crushed and annihilated just man, reduced to the ultimate degree of moral and material want, gain compensation, in the twinkling of an eye, for all that he has suffered? He leaps to his feet and puts himself beyond the senses, beyond human nature and anything that human reason has dared to conceive. His prophetic gaze encompasses the span of the ages, and he knows intuitively the day when he will shake off the dust from his coffin -

[350] Pereat dies in qua natus sum et nox in qua dictum est: conceptus est homo! Dies ille vertatur in tenebras, non requirat eum Deus desuper, et non illustretur lumine... Occupet eum caligo et involvatur amaritudine... Quare non in vulva mortuus sum, egressus ex utero non statim perii? - Quare exceptus genibus? Cur lactatus uberibus?

...Numquid non paucitas dierum meorum finietur brevi? Dimitte ergo me ut plangam paululum dolorem meum, antequam vadam et non revertar, ad terram tenebrosam et opertam mortis caligine. (Job, 3:10.)

[351] Scio enim quod redemptor meus vivit, et in novissimo die de terra surrecturus sum...quem visurus sum, ego ipse, et oculi mei conspecturi sunt et non alius. (Job 19: 25,27)

an intuition written in the unshakable certainty, engraved in the depths of his heart: "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and in the last day I shall rise out of the earth...and in my flesh I shall see my God."

How right the admirable Patriarch was, at the end of his beautiful canticle, to cry out again: Who will grant me that my words may be written? Who will grant me that they may be marked down in a book, with an iron pen and in a plate of lead, or else be graven with an instrument in flintstone?"[352] - doubtless so that they might be read by the generations to come, and fill with the same consolations the immense family of the distressed whose only nourishment is bitter bread and tears.

"I know that my Redeemer liveth." Oh, which of us has ever uttered those words of Job with lively faith without at once feeling their effects? Have not these words brought the dawn of calm amidst the deepest mourning?

Have they not filled our inmost soul with a higher, unknown joy, just when a tear of blood was slipping from our eyelids? Roaming about, bereft of everything, laid low in the wake of triumphant rapacity, we found in the inexhaustible fount of our woes reasons for love and trust. Far from becoming downcast and giving vent to impatience and grumbling, we blessed God, dimly perceiving the infinite depths of His mercy in the secrets of His justice. If the Lord, we would say, gives happiness to His friends, what does He reserve for His servants? If, in distributing good and evil things, He turns the scales towards those who offend and blaspheme Him, the reason is that, for His friends, all the wealth and all the empires of the world seem to Him too insignificant a present. Let us, then, rejoice in our tribulations, and let us measure our future greatness by our present affliction and by the severity of our trial.

In his homily on Dives and Lazarus, St. John Chrysostom reveals to us the sublime philosophy of suffering. Paraphrasing the passage in St. Luke where the rich man, tormented with pain, beseeches Abraham to permit Lazarus to bring him a little drop of water on the tip of his finger in order to refresh his parched, burning tongue, he comments upon the words of Abraham as he says to Dives: "Son, remember that thou didst receive good things in thy lifetime, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and thou art tormented. And besides all this, between us and you, there is fixed a great chaos; so that they who would pass from hence to you cannot, nor from hence come hither."[353] From this reply of Abraham,

[352] Quis mihi tribuat ut scribantur sermones mei? Quis mihi det ut exarentur in libro. Stylo ferreo et plumbi lamina, vel celte sculpantur in silice. (Job 19: 23,24)

[353] Elevans autem oculos suos, cum esset in tormentis, vidit Abraham a longe, et Lazarum in sinu ejus. Et ipse clamans dixit: Pater Abraham, miserere mei, et mitte Lazarum, ut intigat extremum digiti sui in aquam, ut refrigeret linguam meam, quia crucior in hac flamma. - Et dixit illi Abraham: Fili, recordare quia recepisti bona in vita tua, et Lazarum similiter mala, nunc autem hic consolatur, tu vero cruciaris. - Et in his omnibus, inter nos et vos chaos magnum firmatum est, ut hi qui volunt hinc transire ad vos non possint, neque inde huc transmeare. (Luke 16: 23-26.)

St. John Chrysostom draws an admirable teaching.

The evil Dives, says Abraham, had received his good things in his life. In what way? The great commentator explains it thus: Dives, amidst his great wickedness and depravity, had, in this world, done a few good things. In the present life, no one can be absolutely bad; at times the most wicked malefactors comply with the moral law on certain points; amidst their dissipation, they maintain some remnants of natural virtue. Inhuman, and slaves of their cupidity, as they are, nevertheless there are rare and exceptional circumstances when they consent to be just, merciful and impartial. Now God, reserving to Himself the task of punishing them rigorously one day on account of their crimes, and, on the other hand, desiring, for the honour of His justice, to leave no good work unrewarded, however small and imperfect it may be, often, in this world, showers pleasures and temporal goods upon the wicked and ungodly. He grants them, as to Dives, a dazzling, sumptuous life: exquisite and abundant food, soft carpets, a large number of flatterers and parasites, the glitter and pomp of all desirable pleasures. Thus Dives had received his good things.

Lazarus, by contrast, endowed with all the heavenly gifts and having attained the height of perfection by his heroic patience, had probably fallen through weakness into some slight faults. We may suppose that, at the sight of the ostentatious wealth of the man whose crumbs and surplus he had begged in vain, his heart had felt momentarily embittered and revolted. Perhaps his faith and trust had faltered and, to some extent, weakened. Now God, who intended to place Lazarus among His elect and crown him through all eternity, and who, on the other hand, will take the just to Himself only when they have been completely purified of every fault, desired in His hidden designs that Lazarus should undergo long and difficult trials during his earthly career, and sent him sores, sickness, poverty, abandonment and contempt. Thus, when Lazarus reached the end of his life, he had paid his debt to justice, he had received his woes.

Dives and the poor man each received their due from the divine Remunerator: the rich man - sensual pleasures, honours and wealth in this life but, in return, endless and unsparing punishments; the poor man - extreme trials and tribulations in this life, but, in compensation and at the end of the trial, unmixed and unchangeable happiness. Thus it is that order and equality will one day be eternally restored, and that the conduct and hidden designs of divine Providence will find their complete justification on the Day of Judgement.

Let these salutary considerations be engraved upon our minds, and then life's adversities will never succeed in disheartening us. Far from breaking out into complaints and grumbling against the harshness of God when His paternal hand strikes us, we shall bless Him at all times, gratefully receiving the afflictions of the body and the cruel sorrows of the mind as the surest sign of

His preference and tenderness.[354] For whom the Lord loveth, he chastiseth.[355] Did not this thought open to the saints the source of the firmest and most exhilarating consolations?

If we recalled the course of life, we would readily acknowledge that it was on the occasion of desolations and great anguish that our heart felt most deeply moved by the action of God and that we seemed to come closer to Heaven.

So, the world has forsaken us: we have seen our close friends - those who ate our bread and sat at our table - turn away to avoid meeting us, but immediately, the Lord, like a tender mother, clasped us more lovingly in His arms: Dominus autem assumpsit me.[356]

Gloomy death has taken away from you a son, whom, like the mother of Tobias, you called "the light of our eyes, the staff of our old age, the comfort of our life...;"[357] or, still young, you are driven to separate yourself from the world, to mourn your premature widowhood. Yet, have you not obtained supernatural and glorious visions? Have your eyes not had a sort of glimpse of the heavenly future? In the light of divine contemplation you have perceived those dear, lamented beings, enjoying repose in a better world. In your inmost soul, you have heard them say: We are happy and we await you.

This pain, by crushing us in its grip, tears us away from love of present things; it is the sword which cuts through the the clouds, and half-opens other prospects for us, by raising us up to higher hopes. In the fire of tribulation, all the wealth and all the goods for which we yearned so ardently appear as they really are, and become in our eyes, mere smoke and empty shadows. Human life seems to us nothing more than a "moment" in the words of St. Paul. But that moment is a fruitful bud: fertilized by our tears, it will be changed into an immeasurable weight of glory.[358]

Oh, let us, in short, cease to accuse the Creator of harshness and injustice. If God puts us to the test and removes what we hold dear, if He makes the bitter dregs of disappointments and every heart-rending pain trickle down upon us, it is by no means in order to rob us, eo quod

[354] St. Ambrose held that a life free of trials was a certain sign of divine malediction, and said: "I should not wish to live for a single night under the roof of a man who has never suffered." Another saint said: "Why attach any importance to afflictions? Temporal life is but a transition. A whole lifetime of pain in this world is of no more consequence than an uncomfortable night in a bad hostelry."

[355] Quem enim diligit Dominus, castigat. (Hebrews 12:6)

[356] Psalm 26:10.

[357] Heu, heu! me, fili mi, ut quid te misimus peregrinari, lumen oculorum nostrorum, baculum senectutis nostrae, solatium vitae nostrae, spem posteritatis nostrae. (Tobias 10:4)

[358] Momentaneum et leve tribulationis nostrae aeternum gloriae pondus operatur in nobis. (2 Corinthians 4:17)

nolumus expoliari, the Apostle emphasizes, but in order the sooner and the more strikingly to reclothe us in immortality, as in an outer garment: Sed supervestiri.[359]

Let us take the case of a great artist who wants to make a statue. Beneath his hand he has a piece of coarse, shapeless marble; he takes up his chisel, strikes vigorously and mercilessly and makes the stone split into fragments, until the idea which inspires him is reflected in the lines of the statue and pours out that grace and majesty which will be the admiration of the world.

God does the same: holding in His paternal hand the chisel of mortification, He cuts into the quick of our affections. He lets Himself be moved neither by our groans nor by our cries. Mercilessly, He cuts off those links, those friends, that health or reputation, which were as living parts of ourselves. In the fire of pain, He absorbs the attachments, the secret and invisible links which draw us into love of perishable, earthly things. He melts them down, violently eliminating all that remains in us of dross, human alloy and sensual affections, in order that our souls, thus spiritualized, may become like a well-prepared canvas, on which the rays of divine goodness will, one day, succeed in leaving their imprint: ut absorbeatur quod mortale est a vita - that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.[360]

Before being subjected to this purification, man resembles tainted, murky sand; cast into the crucible of suffering, he becomes refined, and is now a limpid, transparent crystal, where the substantial glory of God, no longer encountering any obstacle, can flow freely, like a river without bed or banks: then God will be all and in all things. Just as the images of the sun, of palaces and of trees are reflected, with their shapes and sharpness of outline, in the mirror of a clear river, so the perfections of the divine attributes will be reflected on all the elect without losing their immutable indivisibility. We shall be enveloped in the radiant light of the divine life; it will then be the end, the consummation, the age when time has run its course, the reign of stability and repose, the happy reign to which creatures look forward, and for which they call with such groaning, like a mother in labour who calls to be delivered, and expresses her suffering in plaintive cries and long, painful sighs, omnis creatura ingemiscit et parturit usque adhuc.[361]

Such was the hope of the incomparable mother of the Machabees. She had seen the tender bodies of her six young children being torn apart and mangled before her eyes by the sword of an inhuman tyrant. She stood, bathed in their blood, amidst their mutilated and scattered limbs. Yet in spirit she entered the tabernacles of

[359] 2 Corinthians 5:2.

[360] 2 Corinthians 5:4.

[361] Romans 8:22.

eternal joy and the abode of calm and sweet transports. All the horror which this fearful sight aroused in her, all the grief and cruel pangs inflicted upon her maternal heart, faded before the radiance of her hope, and she encouraged the youngest son, saying: "My son, have pity upon me that bore thee nine months in my womb and gave thee suck three years and nourished thee and brought thee up unto this age: I beseech thee, my son, look upon Heaven and earth and all that is in them: and consider that God made them out of nothing, and mankind also: So that thou shalt not fear this tormentor, but, being made a worthy partner with thy brethren, receive death that in that mercy I may receive thee again with thy brethren."[362]

Let us conclude with a final point.

In the time of the Emperor Theodosius, there was a woman in the East whom the fires of youth and the taste of pleasure, along with the perils of poverty, had plunged into the disorders of a life of corruption and licentiousness.

This woman's name was Mary. She was converted sincerely to God, and the Church has crowned her and raised her to the honours of the altar under the name of St. Mary of Egypt.

She betook herself one day to Jerusalem, for the great solemnities of the feast of the Exhaltation of the Holy Cross. Suddenly she thought she heard a voice, coming from the banks of the Jordan and the depths of the wilderness, call out to her: Come over to us, and you will find innocence and repose.

Without waiting, although the day was beginning to decline, she hastened to run to the the place indicated; but the water was deep, the land around the river abandoned and deserted, and the voice, becoming more insistent, called out unceasingly, in a ringing tone: Come over to us, and you will find innocence and repose.

While she wandered about here and there, consumed with anxiety and fretting in expectation, she saw, coming towards her on the shore a man of the desert, one of those great hermits, with a face transfigured by penance and the voice and gaze of a wonder-worker.

He cast his cloak upon the river, and beckoned to the Egyptian woman to stand on it.

Then in the distance, beneath the clear light of the moon, one might have seen the resplendent courtesan walking dryshod over the water, fleeing what she had loved, and departing in silence, far from the noise of men, to throw her soul upon God, immersed in the ecstatic joys of prayer and in the chaste and austere delights of penance and immolation.

[362] Itaque inclinata ad illum, irridens crudelem tyrannum, ait patria voce: Fili mi, miserere mei, quae te in utero novem mensibus portavi, et lac triennium dedi et alui, et in aetatem istam adduxi. - Peto, nate ut aspicias ad coelum et ad terram et ad omnia quae in eis sunt; et intelligas quia ex nihilo fecit illa Deus, et hominum genus... Suscipe mortem ut in illa miseratione cum fratribus tuis te recipiat. (2 Machabees 7: 27-29)

She lived for many years in the desert, visited by angels, immersed in the transports of divine contemplation and drinking deeply of the foretastes of paradise.

Then, one Good Friday, far from the sight of men, on the banks of a steep, wild torrent, attended solely by God and His angels, she died. We may believe that her final blessing, and the prayer of her agony, were for the hermit who led her into the wilderness and, in making her love suffering, opened her soul to the treasures of peace and cleared the way for her along the path of everlasting bliss.

May we, too, gentle reader, deserve a similar favour from you. In offering these conferences for your meditation, we have no other purpose than to turn souls away from the limited concerns of time, and raise them up to the thought and desire of the good to come. These modest pages, which we submit to your indulgence, are but the ration of deliverance, a compass intended to guide our lives through the numerous perils of this world - in short, a skiff which may help us reach the shores of Heaven.

This book is a mere reminiscence and feeble echo of our apostolate. However, just as, when autumn is ending and the trees shed their fading leaves and become bare, it often happens that a lingering passer-by gathers up these disregarded leaves in spring in order to build a bed or put together a shelter for himself, so, likewise, it often happens that the seed which has not taken root in the field of the head of the household is later blown away by the gusts and whirlwinds of the storm, beyond deserts and oceans, and, after a period of many years, raises up forests and ripens crops. Similarly, these studies on our last ends may have the power to lift souls up to meditate upon the things to come, or, at the very least, our feeble words will be for some sluggish Christians a seed blessed by God, which will bear fruit when the time of the harvest has come. How fortunate if they should have the power to help us through the stormy and uncertain course of our pilgrimage, and enable us more surely to reach the eternal meeting-place which awaits us, one day, in the Heart of Christ!

If we dared flatter you with this hope, gentle reader, we would bid you good-bye - until we meet again! The time is near when the hour of the final departure will strike, when the celestial spouse Whom we have loved and served will say to us: Pass, come to me and enter into bliss and eternal repose!